MERCURY MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST 35¢

Listen to the Night

a chilling, explosive novel of murder by

Ed Lacy

book-length feature

10¢

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Pen Pal
Willard Marsh

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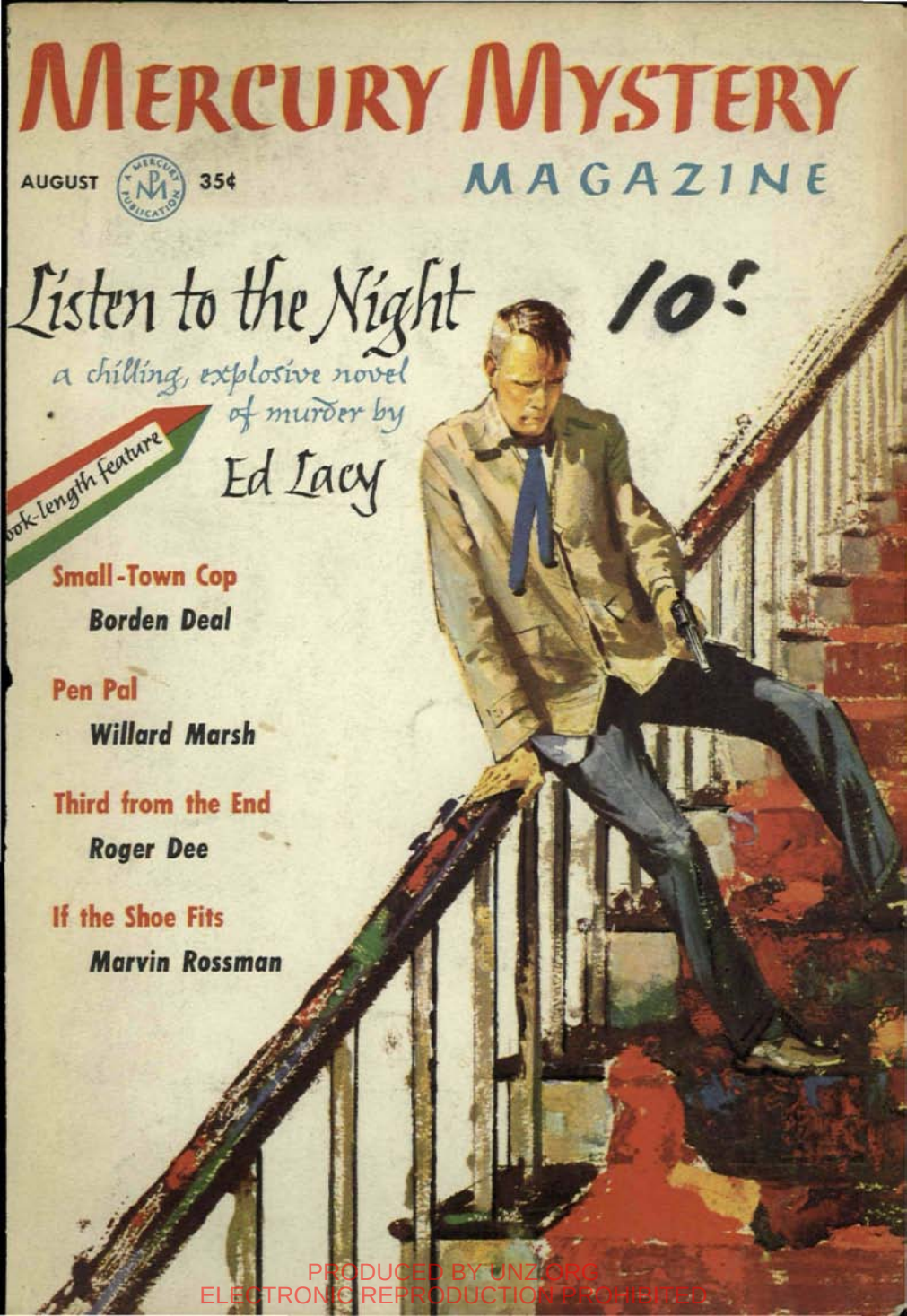

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MERCURY MYSTERY MAGAZINE

August, 1958

LISTEN TO THE NIGHT — *Ed Lacy* — 4

The hick burg of End Harbor, I figured, was strictly out of my district. Till my son's kid Andy started shooting his mouth off about me. Grampa, he announced, is a real New York cop. Grampa is going to find Doc Barnes' killer... And Grampa, I thought, will probably get his fool head blown off... a fast-paced new chiller by Mystery Writers of America award winner Ed Lacy...

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(Cover illustrating "LISTEN TO THE NIGHT")

Mercury Mystery Magazine, AUGUST, 1958, Vol. 4, No. 4, Whole No. 228. Published bi-monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Twelve-issue subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. *©1958 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.*

JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Editor and Publisher*
ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor*
GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*
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LISTEN TO THE NIGHT

by ED LACY

full length book
PREVIEW EDITION

Winner of the recent Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" award for the best mystery novel of 1957 (ROOM TO SWING), Ed Lacy is no stranger to mystery fans. His well-known flare for tight-spun, explosive action plots and sharply drawn, realistic characterization have made him one of the outstanding writers of the "hard-boiled" school. Readers will remember his action-packed novel LEAD WITH YOUR LEFT (Harper), previewed here as KEEP AN EYE ON THE BODY. In this latest Lacy thriller, New York cop Matt Lund takes a vacation in the little village of End Harbor, hoping for some peace and quiet – and finds, instead, lurking terror and the silence of death...

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Prologue

". . . of course I got here as soon as possible, but I was too late—he must have died within seconds after phoning me. I found him over the hall table. You and I, we're more than merely old friends, so believe me when I tell you that in a case like this, there isn't anything a doctor can do. At his age, the heart grows very tired." Doctor Edward Barnes placed a hand on the other's damp, trembling shoulder: a hand both firm and gentle.

"Yes . . . I . . . I understand, Edward." The voice was dazed, sullen with mounting hysteria.

"What?" the doctor asked, cupping an ear, brushing the rain from his face with his other hand. "What did you say?"

"I said . . . I'm okay. It's just . . . I'll miss him so. You know how close we were."

The doctor pulled his old felt hat down as he said, "Come now, no weeping. There isn't much one can say about death, especially the

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death of an old friend. Yet I always find myself groping for the meaningless phrases. Our only consolation is to remember he lived a long and useful life. And he died without pain."

"Yes. I suppose I knew this would happen—some day . . . but . . . Oh God! Ed, it's all so sudden!"

"Maybe you should let yourself go, weep." Barnes reached into his car for his bag. "Naturally you're in shock. I'll give you something to calm your nerves, make you forget."

"I don't need that."

"Listen to me. It's late, there isn't anything either of us can do 'till morning. Standing out here in the rain will only give you a chill. If you like, I'll spend the night here. But take this pill and you'll sleep for . . ."

The doctor's wet and wrinkled face expanded with astonishment for a very brief part of a second as he was viciously kneed in the groin. Gasping, Barnes bent over—arms out like a racing swimmer ready to dive—then he stumbled back against his car, hands now pressed hard to his middle. The killer clamped a hand over the doctor's open mouth, another over the sharp nose. The old man's watery eyes bulged—pain still mixed with surprise. He started to claw the air, then slumped to the wet ground.

Opening the door of the doctor's heavy Buick, the murderer dragged the old man across the front seat, yanked a woolen muffler from around Barnes' thin neck, then savagely jammed it over the doctor's pink face. For a moment the doctor's legs jerked and thrashed as the muffler cut off all air.

Certain Barnes was dead, with great effort the body was picked up and slowly lowered to the floor of the rear of the car. Placing the medical bag on the front seat, the killer slid behind the wheel—moving gracefully—and drove off, driving along the dark back roads of the village.

Reaching Bay Street the murderer stepped out and listened long and carefully, sweating face almost touching the wet pavement. Certain no cars were coming, the doctor's corpse was quickly pulled to the middle of the road. Then backing the Buick up, the killer shifted gears and pressed the gas pedal to the floor.

The big car jumped as it ran over the dead body.

The murderer stepped out and stared down at the rain striking the crushed face, then picked up a pebble. The Buick was aimed at a large tree off the road, the ignition turned off, and the pebble wedged under the accelerator—forcing it as far down as the pedal could go.

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Then reaching in and turning on the ignition, the killer awkwardly jumped back as the Buick leaped forward, crossed the road and smashed into the tree. The thick rain slightly muffled the crashing sound.

Standing perfectly still and hidden in the nearby woods, the killer waited to see if the noise brought anybody, then ran over to the wreck. The pebble was removed, the front and rear seat carefully examined. The doctor's woolen scarf was on the floor beneath the crumpled steering wheel. Grabbing the scarf, the murderer pulled a thin, pencil flashlight from Barnes' bag, quickly played it over the tires. Nothing of the doctor's flesh or clothing had stuck to the new tires. The killer rubbed the scarf over a red spot on a tire wall, then realized it was merely red paint.

Dropping the flash back into the bag, the killer went home, walking and running through unlit streets and woods wherever possible. At the gate of the house the killer was still clutching the doctor's scarf, and with a moan of utter dismay and horror, dropped the muffler with a frantic motion, ran sobbing into the house.

Minutes later, the murderer returned, picked up the scarf and went back into the warm house.

CHAPTER ONE

My 'VACATION' STARTED OFF as I expected—by giving me a hard time.

The railroad station at Hampton was full of sleek cars and people standing around as nude as they could get, without being arrested. I never saw so many scrimpy shorts and stuffed halters in my life. I stepped off the train with my battered bag in one hand and Matty in his wicker basket in the other. I was sure a standout: I was the only person not sporting a tan. Also I had on a tie and a shirt, not to mention my old blue serge suit. Everybody looked at me as though I was an escapee from a museum.

I was sweaty and in a bad mood. I didn't want to come out here and a three hour ride on the Long Island Railroad isn't exactly any laughs for me. Matty was evil too, cooped up in his basket all that time. On the train he'd been wailing and making a small racket. When I poked my finger in to quiet him, he'd showed his feelings by biting it. I'd snapped my finger in his gut and he had hissed like a snake, then shut up.

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As I was looking around the station, sorry I hadn't told Danny to meet me, a fat little man in worn slacks, high shoes, an outrageous sport shirt, and an ancient sweaty straw hat, hustled over to me and made a pass at my bag. As I snatched it to me, he asked, "Hey mista, you wants the taxi, huh?"

I nodded and followed him to an old Dodge. I sat on the front seat, Matty's basket on my lap. The car was hot as a Turkish Bath. The driver went up and down the platform trying to drum up trade, finally got in and started the car with a jerk. "Mista, where you go?"

"End Harbor."

"Gooda summer, now. That my town. Cost you one dolla. You visit some-abody?"

"Know where the Lund cottage is, on Beach Road?" I never found dialect funny, even on TV.

"You bet I know. Vera nice people. You a friend?"

"I hope so. Dan Lund is my son."

A real smile flitted across his weather-beaten face as he turned into a main highway. The Dodge kept edging toward the road shoulder. "Your Danny is a lucky man, his Bessie is a wonderful wife. The second I first saw her I knew she was a Greek, like me. She has all the warm beauty of the . . ."

I didn't have time to wonder what happened to the dialect. I shouted, "You're going off the road!"

He turned the wheel too hard. The car went into a shimmy dance, finally got squared away as Matty growled savagely. This joker stuck a fat hand in my face, told me, "I'm Jerry Sparelous, a true friend of your daughter-in-law. Will you stay in the Harbor long?"

"A week," I said, shaking hands fast so he could put the paw back on the wheel. "Then I visit my daughter in the mountains for a week." Matty seemed to sigh. Or maybe it was me.

I had a month off and Dan insisted I spend the first week with him. The second would be with Signe and her basketball team of noisy kids. Then maybe I could get some real rest in my flat on Washington Heights, sitting in my underwear next to the big window fan, watching TV or doping the nags.

"End Harbor is nice—I've lived here for 35 years," this Jerry said, the car starting off on a tangent again. "What you do, Mr. Lund?"

"I'm a cop. Look Mr. . . . Jerry . . . side of the road again."

"Don't worry," he said, jerking the car around. "In 20 years I never had an accident—that was my fault. Yes, yes, Bessie has told me about you. They want you to retire. You and me. I sold my store and some

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land a few years ago. I have enough money. But people ask why I drive a taxi. They think a man of 64 is fit for nothing but dying . . ."

We went around a turn and made directly for some bushes on the side of the road. I tried to put my foot through the floor board before he headed down the highway again. I said weakly, "Perhaps you need glasses."

"I have two pair—at home. Hot in New York?"

"Yeah."

"Big city is all rush, crazy. I haven't been back to New York in 32 years. Who wants to rush?"

I didn't answer. Three hours away and he hadn't been to the big apple in a third of a century! They couldn't drag me away from New York.

We drove in silence for awhile, except when I told him he was going off the road. It was starting to grow dark and we seemed to be driving through a lonely, wooded section. But on reaching End Harbor we passed a lot of new ranch-type houses.

With a scream of tires he turned into a wide road that went by a pond the size of the Central Park skating rink. "Plenty big bass in there, and they bite on a plug. You a fisherman?"

"I can take it or leave it."

"Me too. Funny, you don't look like a policeman—you're too thin. Me, I wish I was thin. Every day I'm getting more like a squash. Too much beer. Doctor gives me plenty of hell. But I say, what difference does it make if I'm fat, I'm not making a show for the girls. How old are you, Mr. Lund?"

"58."

"Your wife is dead, too. Bessie told me. Jesus, I almost went crazy when my Helen died eight years ago. God rest her soul. I got three boys."

The Dodge went over the only bump in the road and Matty whined.

He turned to smile at the basket. "You have a cat, I have a dog—when he comes home. Strange isn't it, how in our old age we turn to the companionship of animals?"

"I always had a . . ."

"Now we don't talk, Mr. Lund. I have to cross a busy highway on which people race toward Montauk like they are going to St. Peter's gates."

He brought the car to a complete and jerky stop, screwing up his eyes as he peered up and down the road. Cars were going by doing at least 70. A motorcycle cop stationed here could keep a town tax-free.

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He suddenly stepped on the gas and I banged my forehead against the windshield as the car leaped across the road. Then he stopped abruptly to ask if I was hurt, shaking me up again. I had a hell of a headache but told him, "I'm okay. How much farther to the house?"

"Just down this street," Jerry said, starting the car before I could get out. He drove past a few houses and I could smell the salt in the air. Then he stopped, and said proudly, "Here we are, Mr. Lund."

I wanted to say I wouldn't have given even money we'd get here, but I paid him a dollar as the cottage door opened and Andy yelled, "Grandpa is here!"

It always gives me a start to hear myself called Grandpa.

Andy came leaping at me and almost knocked me down with a hug. He's big for his age but still lardy. When my Danny had been 10, he was already muscular, and coming down the porch steps now, in shorts, he still looked in good shape. Maybe Andy got his softness from Bessie—she had an apron around her bathing suit. She wasn't fat but all a kind of sensuous softness that went with her creamy skin, dark hair, and flashing eyes. Sometimes I thought Bessie was too much woman for Danny—or any one man.

They were all over me, pumping my hand, everybody talking at once. Matty was yelling to get out of his basket, and Bessie and Jerry were rattling off Greek. The noise didn't help my headache any. Somehow we finally got into the cottage. Andy was trying to show me a spinning reel he'd just bought and Matty was screaming. I opened the basket and the cat immediately made a quick sniffing tour of the cottage. I asked Bessie for an empty box and began filling it with torn newspapers. She said, "Oh for—can't that beast do its business outside?"

"Matty isn't for any outdoors stuff. Doubt if he'll even leave the house. And he might get ticks. I'll take care of his box. Will I have time to take a hot bath?"

Danny burst out laughing. "Bath? All we have is a shower. Bess, have we time for a fast swim?"

"If you make it real quick." She patted my face. "Special for you I'm making *rice pilaf* and that wine-pudding you love, *moustalevrai.*"

"That settles it, we'll take a swim," Danny said. When I hesitated, he poked me on the arm—and my head rang—asked, "What the devil kind of a Norseman are you?"

"Yes, Grandpa," the kid chimed in, "We have the blood of Leif Ericsson in our veins. That's what you told me."

As I got into my old woolen trunks the room seemed quiet and my

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headache eased up. I unpacked my suitcase into a drawer, carefully hid my empty service gun. I didn't want to leave it around the flat, in case the place was robbed or something. I could smell Bessie's cooking and I was real hungry, so I decided to get the damn swim over with. Swimming! I sure missed the peace and quiet of my flat!

Everybody remarked about the whiteness of my skin as I gave Andy a boat kit I'd brought for him. He let out a whoop of joy that split my ear-drums. Then Danny rushed us out to his new Ford and we drove the two blocks to the beach. I felt dizzy. As they used to say during the war, was this entire trip necessary?

The water was smooth and the tide low. I splashed around in the damn chilly water, then banged my toe on a rock, while the boy showed off his underwater swimming. He pointed out a rowboat in which we would go fishing tomorrow. Dan had to swim under my legs, come up and throw me over. I spit out a mouthful of salt water and tried to hold my temper.

As we stood on the sandy beach and toweled ourselves dry, Danny started working on me. First he made some crack about my wool trunks with the white belt being the only pair in existence and why didn't I live it up a little and buy a new pair? Then, driving back to the cottage, he told me, "Dad, I'm a sure thing to be made head of the accounting department next month. It means a big raise and . . . well, if you want to retire I could easily give you fifty or sixty dollars a month."

"Who wants to retire? I like being a cell block attendant, hanging around the precinct house all day. No walking a post or worrying about the weather, no carrying a belt full of junk."

"But Dad, you're practically a janitor there!"

"He's not a janitor, he's a cop," Andy said quickly.

I stared at Dan with surprise; being a phoney had never been one of his faults. "What's wrong, son? Are you getting that snob executive outlook too, along with your big desk? Sure I sometimes sweep up and put out the ashes, depending on the tour I'm working, but there's nothing wrong with that. No work is degrading—as long as you always have a choice of work. And you know how simple my wants are—anytime I feel like retiring my pension will do me fine."

"Okay," Dan said, "It was just an idea."

When we reached the cottage Bessie gave me a small hug—she smelled fine—and asked, "Matt, don't you feel invigorated?"

"You bet," I said, slapping her plump behind, and going to my room to dress—and sneak a nip of brandy to ward off a cold. Matty

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was sitting on my bed, switching his tail nervously, his eyes seemed to be asking me, "What the devil are we doing out here?" Andy came in to put on a sweatshirt and poked at the cat. Matty got up on his hind feet to box and I told the boy, "Take it easy, he's hungry."

"Mama put down a saucer of milk for him but he wouldn't drink it. Gosh, Grandpa, I go for that boat kit you gave me. After we go fishing tomorrow, I'll start on it."

"Do we have to go fishing?" I was thinking of spending tomorrow sleeping.

"Sure, porgies are biting. I want to try out my spinning reel. Pops wanted to give it to me but I insisted on paying for it. Two dollars. Pops is some fisherman, can catch any . . ."

Bessie called us in to eat. I added a little beer and sugar to Matty's milk before I sat down and the cat licked it up like a pig. Dan said, "I'll be damned!" While Bessie said, "Really Matt, you and that fat cat. You need a wife."

"Figure out a way of doing away with Danny and I'm your man," I cornballed. Bessie blushed with pleasure. Her good breasts seemed ready to pop over the top of her skimpy bathing suit. I glanced at Dan. His eyes met mine and they were full of pride—like when he was a kid and Martha would be telling me about some smart thing he'd done. Martha would have liked Bessie.

The *rice pilaf* was a dish of steaming spiced rice packed with livers and other meats served like an upsidedown cake. I tried not to stuff myself only I couldn't resist the wine pudding and I was barely able to get up from the table. I gave Matty some scraps which he picked over. Bessie said, "Don't leave the scraps around, they'll bring bugs."

"Don't worry, he'll eat it. But he likes to take his time," I said. I got my pipe working and sat on the couch, knowing I was in for a rough night, my guts drum-tight. Andy and Dan washed the dishes while Matty sat by the screen door, gazed cautiously out at the country night.

Andy went to bed after warning me, "You hit the sack soon too, Grandpops, we have to be full of pep for fishing tomorrow."

Bessie brought out a bottle of Irish whiskey and we sat around, had a few belts, she and Dan going over some local gossip. When Matty curled up on the couch beside me we had a mild argument as to whether cats were cleaner than human animals. My stomach eased up a bit and I asked, "What's with your friend Jerry? One minute he talks like a bad comedian, and then all the dialect vanishes."

"Oh, he's a character," Bessie said. "Waged a one-man war with End

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Harbor for years. When he first came here he really had an accent and they gave him the cold shoulder. You know the jive: most people in town can trace their ancestors back to 1776, as if that means a thing. Then it seems Jerry wrote a letter to the local paper against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, making him the village radical. So he said the hell with them and purposely kept on talking with his horrible accent. Why, he even refused to buy a brick for the Legion building here, but he always marches at the head of the July 4th parade and they can't leave him out—he won the Distinguished Service Cross in World War I, highest medal anybody in the Harbor has. Whole thing is pretty silly: on both sides."

"Yeah. Still, a man has to have plenty of moxie to thumb his nose all his life at his neighbors," I said.

"And a stubborn capacity for loneliness," Dan added, yawning. "I have to catch the 7 A. M. train back to the job, so I think I'd better turn in."

"Me too, I can't let a weekend husband sleep alone," Bessie said. She rubbed her knee. "My leg aches, going to rain."

"Dad, don't you bother getting up early tomorrow," Dan said, coming over to take a mock punch at my head. "I'll see you Friday night —all tanned and rested."

"And with a nervous breakdown," I told myself. I feinted a left and jabbed his belly with my right. We used to box a lot, until he reached 16 and got too big for me.

They washed up and went to their bedroom. I listened to the radio, and the noises in my stomach, read through the local paper. The radio had a lot of static. So did my belly. I could hear Bessie and Dan whispering and laughing behind their door. Finally at ten, as it began to rain hard, I went to bed, Matty following me.

The bed was soft as mush and I kept twisting and turning like a live pretzel. After years of working round-the-clock tours sleep either comes easily, or it's work. It's always a battle for me. I kept sinking in various parts of the mattress, for a time I fanned at a buzzing mosquito, then I listened to the rain and tried to think about Jerry's one-man fight, and if it was all worth it. I got up and took a swig of brandy, sat in the john for a time reading a woman's fashion mag that was all ads. Then I made myself some tea.

As I was puttering around in the kitchen, Bessie came out wearing hip length baby-doll pajamas, and my God, she looked like a walking barber shop calendar. "Anything the matter, Matt? Told you it would rain."

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"Be my luck, a rainy week. I couldn't sleep so I'm making some tea. Want a cup?"

"Nope. Heard you padding around." She pointed to my flannel pajamas and shook her head. "You're a goner if an antique shop spots that outfit. Right out of Esquire—1910 issue."

"You ought to be more careful how you walk around."

"Why, does it excite you?"

"Okay, okay, stop the super-sophisticated chatter."

She reached up and batted a finger against my long nose. "I've thought about you, father-in-law. You worry me. We're going to have a talk during the week. Now go to sleep."

As Bessie walked across the room I couldn't keep my eyes from the sway of her hips. "I worry you? A talk about what?"

"Sex," she called over her shoulder, closing their bedroom door.

For a second I was completely confused. I had my tea and wondered why young folk think it's smart to make conversation about four-letter words. Or was my generation any brighter in keeping them hidden, making them words of fear?

When I got to bed Matty fixed himself around my big feet and I closed my eyes, waited for sleep to come.

The next thing I knew Andy was shaking me. I opened my eyes to see a cloudy dawn outside the screened window. The boy said cheerfully, "Six o'clock. We're going fishing today."

"Damn it, can't you let me get some rest!" I snapped.

He backed away. "Dad and Mom are up and I . . . I thought you'd want to ride to the station with them."

The uncertain look in his eyes made me ashamed. I reached out and rubbed his plump shoulders. "Sure. I always wake up . . . eh . . . cranky. You got the bone structure, now it's time you started making muscles, young man. Maybe I'll get you a barbell for Christmas. Rowing is good too."

The boy left and I lay in bed for a moment, wishing I could go back to sleep, knowing I couldn't. I still felt bloated and a little tired. I finally got up; a soak in a hot tub would cure me. Matty gave a sleepy whine in protest as I pulled my feet away from his back.

Dan and Bessie were moving about in the kitchen—living room. As I waved and headed for the bathroom, Dan asked, "What are you up so early for, Dad? Want to take a quick dip?"

"Keep up that kind of talk and I'll spank you—with a baseball bat," I said, closing the bathroom door. I cursed, forgetting they didn't have a bath. But I took a hot shower, and things came out all right, and I

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felt better as I dressed, my clothes slightly damp. We had a big breakfast.

The milk man drove up and Bessie said, "I'd better pay him for last week's milk."

She left the screen door open and I was surprised to see Matty up and stretching. The cat went outside and sniffed around with disdain, then followed Bessie back into the cottage, shaking the dew from his paws. Bessie sat down to finish her coffee, said, "The milk man told me Dr. Barnes was killed last night in an auto accident."

"It's 6:20, we haven't much time," Dan said. "Who's Barnes?"

"You know—the doctor. Seems he ran his car into a tree, not far from here, was thrown out on the road, and run over by another car."

"Can we see where it happened?" Andy asked.

"You certainly can't," Dan told him. "Everybody drives too sloppy-fast around here."

"Imagine, the poor man out on the road, dead all night in the rain," Bessie said, crossing herself.

"You mean he was *killed* by a hit and run driver?" I asked.

"I don't know. A post office truck found the body two hours ago. Perhaps whoever ran over the doctor, thought he'd hit an animal or something."

"Nuts. When you hit 'something' weighing 150 or 200 pounds, you certainly know it isn't a squirrel," I said.

Dan got up and locked his briefcase. "Lot of dogs killed by cars. Sometimes even a deer."

"Sounds odd. If I hit a dog or a deer, I'd damn well get out to see what I hit."

"Well," Bessie said, stacking the dishes in the sink, "now you understand, Andy, why I wouldn't bring your bike out here. This means we'll have to go to Hampton if we need a doc."

I wanted to stay home, sit on the porch for awhile, but Bessie insisted I drive to the station with them. Andy argued all the way on how careful he'd be if they let him have his bike. There was a small crowd at the station, mostly wives giving their husbands last minute advice, or vice versa.

It was cold and damp, the coffee had worn off, and I sat in the car, feeling irritated, wishing I was home in my own bed. Jerry drove two young girls to the station, stood around chattering with Bessie in Greek. The old man looked like I felt—as if he'd been up all night. We saw Dan off and Bessie said I *had* to see the countryside. Andy

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and she got into a long argument over whether he could go fishing if it was cloudy. I wanted to tell them both to shut up.

Andy was making a pest of himself, impatiently asking the time every few minutes and Bessie told him if he didn't stop it there wouldn't be any fishing even if the sun came out. We finally parked in front of the End Harbor supermarket at a little after eight. The sun was dodging behind rain clouds and it was a muggy day. End Harbor was sure a hick town: a small movie house, a dozen or so stores including the big supermarket. And an ancient building, a three-story brick job, that I later learned was a combination hotel, city hall, police and fire department headquarters, post office, and telephone company. There was a small crowd in front of this building.

Andy wanted to see what was up and Bessie said, "You go down there with Grandpa while I shop." The kid's face lit up.

"I won't forget to get clams for bait. Don't you forget to buy a paper."

We stopped at the one stationery-tobacco-newspaper store, where I bought the Times and the moon-faced woman behind the counter gave me a silly grin as she said, "You're new to End Harbor. Now I know the summer has really started."

"Has it? Do you carry the Morning Telegraph?"

"Oh my, I never even heard of it. A new paper?"

"It's a racing sheet."

"We wouldn't carry *that*," she said, clamping her fat lips together.

The week was growing worse every minute. I couldn't even dope the nags.

Outside, Andy headed for the crowd and I said, "You go along, I'll sit in the car and read the paper."

"Come on, Grandpa, don't be such an old crab," he said, pulling on my arm. I was too mad to even swat his rear.

The crowd was around an old Buick, the front battered in, all doors open. The entire motor was shoved back, the steering wheel almost touching the seat. Andy asked if this was the doctor's car and somebody whispered, "Yes. It hit a tree and he was thrown out."

A young cop in a fancy light blue uniform, red bow tie and red shoulder patch, black leather belt and puttees, was leaning against the fender of the car, obviously enjoying his self-importance. He looked like a store cop.

Andy met some kid he knew and when they took a few steps forward to get a better look at the wreck, the cop actually screamed, "Hey! Get back there!"

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The kids jumped with fright. Andy said, "My Grandpop is a cop too, a *New York City* policeman!"

People turned to glance at me. I felt like a fool. The boy-cop, feeling he had to prove his authority, walked over to the kids, barked, "I told you to keep back." He pushed them—Andy nearly fell.

I said, "Take it slow, buster, the kids aren't doing anything."

"Okay, old timer, you keep out of this."

Andy looked up at me, to see what I would do . . . and that's how the whole mess really started.

I couldn't let this badge-happy jerk talk me down in front of Andy. I strolled over to the wreck, casually examined the front doors. Buster yelled, "What the hell you doing?" and grabbed my arm.

Pulling my arm away so hard he stumbled, I said, "Keep your mitts off me." As I took out my wallet, flashed my tin, I heard the crowd whispering.

"You haven't any authority here," Junior said, his voice not sure.

"Haven't I? You don't know your law—I'm a Peace Officer *anywheres* in the State of New York." I only intended going through the motions of looking at the wreck and let it go at that, but the boy-cop spoiled things by pointing to the building, telling me, "You'd best go in and see Chief Roberts."

Everybody was watching me and I *had* to follow through. It still would have been a snap to get out of, if Andy had remained outside, like I told him. Instead, the dumb kid followed me into the building, which was older than NYC precinct houses, which are older than God.

In the lobby there was a bronze marker, something about the British shelling the spot in 1777. I was ready to turn and walk out, when Andy suddenly opened a door marked POLICE CHIEF, yelled, "Here it is, Grandpa!"

It was a small office and the man behind the desk was sporting the same musical comedy uniform, and a big gold badge. End Harbor had the youngest police force in the world: Chief Roberts looked like a heavyweight boxer, with a collar-ad face. He was doing some paper work, and snapped, "I'm busy."

With the kid beside me, I couldn't back out, so I flashed my badge, said in a small voice, "Matt Lund, New York City police. Thought I . . . eh . . . might give you a hand."

"Chief Art Roberts," he said, holding up a big paw for me to shake. "A hand with what?"

"With the Doctor Barnes case," Andy cut in. I put a hand on the boy's shoulder, for him to keep still.

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For a second Roberts looked as if he was being kidded, then he said, "We're used to accidents here and can. . . ."

I couldn't stand there like a dummy. I asked, "Accident? Is that for true, or just for public gossip?"

He tried to hold himself in, but he jumped a little. He waved a big hand at me, said, "Plain as the nose on your face: the Doctor skidded into a tree, was thrown clear of the car. Medical Examiner isn't sure if death was a result of the fall or came from being run over."

"Chief, my nose is plainer than that. I don't like sticking it in anybody else's business, I'm here on vacation . . ." I nodded down at Andy, hoping Roberts would understand why I had to make the play.

He merely growled, "What are you trying to say, Pop?"

Maybe it was the 'Pop' that did it. "That it couldn't have been an accident. Look at the steering wheel, it would have pinned the driver against the seat."

"Maybe yes and maybe no. No witnesses. Also possible he was thrown out of the car on impact, before the wheel was pushed back. I think it was an accident."

I should have let it go but Andy said, "My Grandpa is a Peace Officer, too," although I squeezed his shoulder hard.

"You don't say," Roberts said, voice loaded with sarcasm. "I'm busy, so if you'll . . ."

"Look, I'm not trying to tell you your business, but if you'll come outside I'll show you something that says it *couldn't* have been an accident."

He stood up and, Lord, the tight uniform showed off his fine build; like Maxie Baer in his prime. "Now listen Mr. . . ."

"Lund."

"Lund. Ain't you pushing your badge kind of far? One of our best citizens is killed in a routine accident and you start calling it something else."

"Aren't you interested in how your best citizen was killed?"

He stuck his cap on—at a practiced cocky angle, said—as if talking to an idiot, "Okay, I'll look to make you happy."

We went out and the boy-cop whined, "Chief, I tried to tell him . . ."

The Chief waved him silent, then the son-of-a-bitch tried to showboat me. He said, loudly, "Pay attention, Wally, a big time cop from the big city is about to show us yokels how to operate."

"I didn't say that, or that I . . ."

"You got me out of my office, Lund, now either put up or shut up."

The crowd was watching us with mild curiosity and that made me

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sore too—I must have looked pitiful next to Mr. America in the fancy uniform.

"Well, come on, what have you got to show me?" Roberts asked.

I went over to the door by the driver's seat, shut and opened it; did it again. "Notice it isn't loose or in poor working condition. Look at the lock, it isn't sprung, not even scratched."

"What you trying to prove, that they made better cars in the old days?" Roberts wisecracked.

"It proves that unless the Doc drove with his door open, he wasn't in the car when it crashed into the tree. If his body had hit the door with enough of a wallop to force the door open, or if the impact of the car hitting the tree had been great enough to fling the door open —the lock would have been sprung."

Roberts glanced around at the crowd like a ham actor, whispered, "What the devil are you trying to say, Lund?"

"Just that with the steering wheel pushed to the back of the seat, and the door lock in good shape, it seems clear to me that Doctor Barnes wasn't in any accident—he was murdered." I wasn't talking loudly but a gasp went up from the crowd and I heard the word "*murdered*" repeated in a shock chorus.

"We haven't had a murder in End Harbor in 76 years. As for the steering wheel, like I told you, the Doc might have been thrown out before the steering wheel could pin him."

"That's possible, but not probable. But tell me how a man can be thrown through a closed door without springing the lock?"

Roberts' handsome face flushed.

"It was a muggy night, maybe he was driving with the door partly open."

"The car must have been doing at least 70 when it hit the tree, judging by the battered motor. What man drives that fast on a rainy night with the door open?"

The boy-cop who had been staring at the door with puzzled eyes, now said, "Chief, everybody knows Doc Barnes was a bug about safe driving. He was always preaching. . . ."

"Aw shut up, Wally!"

I gave Roberts a small smile; I suppose I was really enjoying myself. "I hope I haven't given you more work. I didn't mean to butt in, it's your case, but my grandson here . . . well, you know how it is."

There wasn't anything more to say and I walked Andy through the crowd. Glancing at Roberts, I saw him glaring at me: murder would sure upset the quiet routine of his job.

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CHAPTER TWO

BESSIE WAS WAITING with a pile of packages outside the cashier's counter. "I've been standing here so long the butter and frozen foods have probably melted. Imagine what they're saying—that Doctor Barnes was murdered. If that isn't the most fantastic thing I ever . . ."

"Grandpa told them so, Mom!" Andy cut in, his voice high with excitement. "Oh, Mama, you should have seen the way Grandpa told the Police Chief why it *had* to be murder. Grandpa is a *Peace Officer*, too! I bet like Wyatt Earp in the cowboy. . . ."

"Keep still, Andy. Matt, you didn't start this horrid rumor?"

"Isn't a rumor but murder. I told you this morning that hit and run business didn't rest right with me. Newspapers to the contrary, most people aren't hit and run drivers. At least the guy would have stopped and . . ."

"Guy?" Bessie asked, opening the car door for us. "We women drive too, remember?"

". . . slowed down, even if he didn't stop. Once he saw the wrecked car, and knew he wouldn't be blamed for hitting the doc, he would have reported it."

Driving away Bessie said, "A murder in End Harbor, in this quiet little village . . . Matt, are you positive?"

"Tell Mom about the door locks," Andy called out from the back seat. "Grandpa, how many killings you been on?"

"None."

His "Oh" oozed with disappointment.

Bessie's knee nudged mine and she made a waving motion with her little finger. Andy must have been watching her in the windshield mirror, for he asked, "Who you telling to shut up, Mom?"

"Nobody, mister big eyes and ears. I don't like all this murder talk. I don't want to hear another word about it—especially from you."

"Can I ask Grandpa one last question?"

"Go ahead. Lord, you should have heard the way the gossip spread through the supermarket. An absolute stranger, a woman, came up and whispered it to me as if. . . ."

"You said I could ask the question," Andy cut in. "Grandpa, when are you going to catch the killer?"

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"Andy, all I plan to catch is some sleep. I'm on vacation." I tried to change the subject. "Clouds seem to be lifting; don't you want to try your spinning reel?"

"Sure, but I thought . . .?"

"Andy, police work is exactly that—work. I merely put my two cents in because I didn't like the way that young cop was pushing you around. We'll let the End Harbor police do their own work. You and I are going to pack a few sandwiches, take our lines and see what's in the bay."

Bessie groaned. "Don't know where my head is, I forgot bread. We'll stop at Tony's."

She drew up before a small store and I said, "I'll get the bread." A beefy young man was leaning across the counter, looking bored. He straightened up slowly when he saw me, said, "Now that you're here, I know it's summer."

"What? Let me have a loaf of whole wheat."

"Yes sir. And what else?"

"That's all. Give me a couple cans of beer, any brand."

He looked bored again as he got the beer. "Tell you mister, business ain't worth getting out of bed for these days. It's after nine and I just broke the ice with you. That goddamn supermarket is squeezing out every merchant. My folks made a good living from this store as far back as I can recall but now . . . big chains put the whole town on its back. Oh, they give jobs to a few people, but they drain all the money out, spend it elsewhere and . . . Sorry, didn't mean to cry on your shoulder. Suppose you heard about Doc Barnes' accident? Now I hear some state trooper says it's a murder. Gives one the creeps."

"Murder always does," I said, paying and taking my bag.

Reaching the cottage, Bessie found Matty sleeping on the couch. When she pushed him off, the cat arched his back and spat at her. "Give me any back talk, you fat tom, and you'll be crab bait. Andy, go down to the Johnsons and borrow their oars."

"You bet," the boy said, dashing out.

As I helped Bessie put things away she told me, "Matt, I don't like all this murder talk around Andy. He sees enough violence on TV. Thank God he's getting a summer off from that."

"Don't shield him too much, this is a pretty violent world."

"Matt, you're not taking part in this . . . murder, are you?"

"Hell no. It's none of my business. Technically I am a Peace Officer but I only opened my yap to show-off for Andy, I suppose."

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"Let's not talk about it in front of Andy. And don't let him horse you into rowing way out—the weather can change fast here. And take it easy rowing, you've done enough grandstanding for one day."

I patted her cheek. "Since when did you become such a worry bug? Matter of fact, I don't intend to touch the oars: about time Andy got rid of his baby fat. He's growing up fine, Bessie."

"Of course. It's been fourteen months since my miscarriage. We're trying hard for another child."

"Don't worry about it. If it happens, it happens. And if it doesn't —you have Andy. Martha and I had two kids within three years and after that, nothing."

"It isn't a fixation with me, or anything. But I do so want a girl. Would you like to play bridge tonight? I can ask the Prestons over."

"I don't care. Better make it tomorrow night, I didn't sleep much last night. Guess I'll get into my trunks."

"Take pants along, in case the sun comes out and cooks that pale skin of yours."

I changed while she made lunch. Then I fed Matty and cleaned out his box, stretched out for a snooze just as Andy returned with the oars. He got his fishing tackle together, including a pair of old metal binoculars. I picked them up, hung them around my neck.

Andy said, "Dad lets me use them this summer. They're powerful."

"I know." They were good glasses, cost five dollars—back in 1929 when Martha gave them to me for Christmas. I gave them to Danny on his 16th birthday. Now Andy had 'em. It gave me a happy warm feeling—and made me feel old.

I carried the oars and the lunch while Andy took the fishing gear. He was a true fishing nut, talked rods and reels all the way to the beach. I hoped he would outgrow that soon, I've always found guys who go in for a lot of fishing gear to be bull artists—and not just about fish, either.

In the light of morning, even a dull one, the bay seemed far prettier than last night. It was a large rough circle of water opening on the Sound, or maybe the ocean. Andy started swimming out to get the rowboat. While I didn't want to get wet, I couldn't let him swim alone. The damn water was still ice cold and when we got the boat ashore, Andy wanted to empty some of the water and I almost broke my back tipping the heavy tub. We finally pushed off and to my surprise the boy rowed well. As I lit my pipe the sun came out for a spell. I examined some of the anchored yachts through the glasses, and if it wasn't for my damp trunks, I would have enjoyed things.

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Dropping anchor outside the breakwater, we got our hooks over. Fishing wasn't exactly a success. Not only didn't we catch anything but Andy's spinning reel wouldn't work. The fish kept eating my bait without my feeling a bite. I realized I was getting a burn and put on my pants and shirt. I didn't have to worry about the kid, he was brown as coffee. He was upset over the reel. I tried to monkey with it but mechanical gadgets are always over my noggin. I gave it up, asked if he wanted a sandwich. He pointed at the remains of a rotting dock, told me, "Pops usually fishes there. The reel was working for him yesterday. You should have seen him cast with it—sent it out a mile."

I put the glasses on the dock. "Nobody there."

Andy said, "Damn. I mean darn—Pops is always here."

The kid fished with my rod while I had a sandwich and some chocolate milk Bessie had fixed. My backside ached from sitting on the hard boat seat and I felt sleepy. I sat there, holding my head in my hands, feeling the stubble on my chin, almost dozing, when Andy caught a small blow fish and startled me with his shouting. He tickled its white belly to show me how it blew itself up into a ball, then said it was too small to eat and tossed it back. Funny, when I was growing up we never ate them—now they were a delicacy. The kid wanted to row some more. He didn't head out into the bay but followed the shoreline. "There's Pops!" he said.

Andy was pointing a chubby finger at an old fashioned but well kept-up house that stood above a cluster of trees. It was a large square house, painted white with red trim and in the center of the roof there was a small glass enclosed room with a railing running around it. A man was lying on a cot, taking what little sun there was. He seemed to have a blanket over most of him and a large, floppy, straw hat covered his head and face. Sneakers and old army suntans stuck out of the bottom of the cot. I put the glasses on him, couldn't see any better. There was a paper on the floor, I figured he was probably sleeping.

"Grandpa, you know what that is? That kind of . . . of house up on the roof?" Andy asked with the self importance of the newly learned.

"No," I lied. "What is it?"

"In the days when End Harbor was a big whaling port, the wife of the captain of the ship would walk on the roof every day, looking out on the bay, to see if her husband's ship was coming in. I bet from up there she could see for about fifty miles, maybe a hundred. Anyway, they call it the Widow's Walk because she never knew whether she was a widow or not. I mean, if the boat never came back." He was

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making for the shore and now he stood up and called, "Pops!" waved his hands.

"Sit down, you'll turn the boat over. You're too far away for him to hear. Beside he looks like he's sleeping. What's the man's real name?"

"I don't know, everybody calls him Pops. He knows lots of things about fishing and . . . Heck, I thought I'd ask him to fix my reel. He sold it to me."

There was a faint line of narrow beach, then a steep bank that rose ten or fifteen feet and disappeared into a layer of trees. The house sure had privacy. I asked, "Do you think we'd be bothering him if we took the reel to his house?" I had enough of the boat and water.

"No. Mom says he's a very spry man for his age. What does spry mean?"

"That he has pep. We'll go ashore here and walk up. I'll row and you watch out for rocks. Has he any dogs?"

"I don't know," the kid said moving forward as I took over the oars. "He lives with Mr. Anderson. He's the mailman here. He also has a big vegetable truck."

We beached the boat and with obvious delight Andy scolded me for not burying the anchor in the sand. I helped him up the bank, getting myself dirty. After the trees we came to a large field that ran up to the house. It was a nice hunk of land. Behind the house there was an open garage with a large new truck. A station wagon stood in the driveway that circled through a well-kept lawn. Everything about the place showed a lot of care and except for the truck it looked like a rich man's estate.

We were about half way across the field when one of the side windows of the house flew up and a shotgun barrel covered us as a man's voice yelled, "Hold it! Don't you read signs? You're trespassing on private property!"

I grabbed Andy, said, "Don't move." Then I called out, "Put that damn gun away. The boy merely wants to see Mr. . . . Pops. I didn't see any NO TRESPASSING signs."

"Should have come around by the road. Well, don't stand there, come along. Be careful where you walk, stay on the path." He stood in the window, the gun still on us. He was a stocky joker. I kept the kid behind me and I was puffing as we reached the house. It was quite a slope.

The man and gun left the window and a moment later appeared on the screened porch that ran around the house. He was holding the

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gun by the barrel now. It was an expensive pump shotgun. He had on a thin polo shirt that showed off his bulky shoulders, and work pants. He looked about 45, a strong man with a thick neck, heavy iron-grey hair, and a wide, homely face. He wasn't tall, in fact looked smaller than he was—like Marciano did in the ring. "What do you want to see Pops about? He's not feeling well."

"I wanted to ask him about this reel he sold me," Andy said. "It don't—doesn't work."

The guy smiled and it completely changed his face, gave it some life. "You must be the kid who wouldn't take the reel for a gift, wanted to buy it. He told me about you. What's wrong with it?" he asked, coming down the porch steps.

"Stuck."

He rested the gun between his knees as Andy handed him the reel. I said, "If you're so fond of guns, learn how to handle them. If you should happen to kick the shotgun now, it would blow your head off. And you ought to think twice or three times about pointing it at people —even trespassers."

He looked up from the reel, eyes staring right in mine. He had honest eyes. "You must be this city policeman causing all the fuss." He held out a large hand. "I'm Larry Anderson."

"Matt Lund," I said, shaking his mitt.

"Sorry I shouted at you. This used to be farm land and it's full of ruts and holes. I'm afraid somebody will break a leg. As for the gun, I've been jumpy as a cat all morning. Pops had a mild heart attack right after breakfast and—you know about Doc Barnes. I couldn't even get a Hampton doctor to come over, those society snobs. Anyway, Pops' condition isn't serious and one of the docs gave me instructions over the phone. Pops will have to rest for a week or so, absolute rest. Meantime, just to play it safe, I've contacted a specialist in New York." He took out a pen knife and loosened a screw in the reel. It spun smoothly. "It's okay, son, you had it down too tight."

Andy thanked him and as we turned to walk back to the boat, Anderson said, "I'd better show you the path."

"I don't want to put you out . . ."

"That's okay." As we followed him across the field he said over his thick shoulder, "Of course the Doc's death upset me too. As a member of the town council, I—and Art, Chief Roberts—have called a meeting for noon. Murder makes it a terrible mess. But you were right, Mr. Lund. At least the Chief agrees it's murder. But it sure doesn't make sense, anybody killing a sweet guy like Ed Barnes who always . . .

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Careful, step around these wooden boards. Old well here and the weather may have rotted the cover. I know Doc would have been the first to agree with us about the publicity."

"What publicity?" I asked.

"The summer season hasn't been too good, as it is. Now this murder talk—it won't help business or the good name of the Harbor."

When we reached the beach he said something about wind taking the POSTED signs he'd tacked to the trees.

Turning to me, he said, "On behalf of the Harbor Council I want to thank you for helping our police department."

"Guess in time Roberts would have noticed the door lock. He was excited. Young bunch of policemen you have."

"Maybe you can give him a hand on this case?"

"Nope, I'm on vacation here, for a week."

"Well, thank you again for your interest. Don't think we'll have much more sun, I'll take Pops back to his room. I'm trying to get a woman to help out around the house, but help is difficult to find during the summer." He touched the binoculars around my neck. "Getting a lazy man's view of the harbor?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I have to tend to Pops. Treat that reel with care and it will work fine, sonny."

Andy said he would and we rowed out. The kid got off some long casts while I pulled in a fair sized porgy and the bastard cut my hands with his fins. Andy gave me a lecture on how to land a fish and I gave up fishing for the day. I saw Anderson up on the Widow's Walk, talking to Pops. Then he easily lifted the old man in his arms, stopped for a second as if to point us out to Pops, then easily carried him into the house.

The sun came out again and we hung around the buoy for a long time, Andy catching a couple more porgies. I was getting stiff and when it started to cloud up again, over Andy's protests, I said it was time to head for home.

Neither Bessie nor the car were at the beach. Andy asked some women where she was but they said she hadn't been down as yet. We went to the cottage and Bessie wasn't there either. While the boy took the oars back, I showered and shaved, and then climbed into the mushy bed for a nap. It started to rain lightly and I lay there, listening to the rain hit the roof—an interesting sound for anybody accustomed to working in the damn rain.

I was only wearing shorts and my knees were lobster red; in fact

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my skin was so hot I couldn't cover myself with a sheet and had to shove Matty off the bed. He tried to jump back on again and I got up and pushed him into the living room, closed the door. I took a belt of brandy and stretched out again.

Pain in my legs awoke me. Bessie was sitting on the bed, shaking me, her slacks pressing against my sunburnt knees. Her dark eyes were large and frightened. I asked, "What's the matter?" and moved away from her. It was still raining and at first I thought the shades were down, then I glanced at my watch—it was after eight.

"Matt, Andy and I have been riding all over town looking for you, and here you are, pounding your ear!"

I sat up and groaned; my skin felt as if it was cracking. "Damn, but I've got a burn. Got anything for that?"

"I saw Matty on the couch outside so I thought you had gone to town or . . . I'm all mixed up. Matt, Matt, they've arrested Jerry for Dr. Barnes' murder!"

I stood up and shook with a small chill; my red skin seemed to change from hot to ice every second. I was afraid to put on a robe. "Jerry, the dialectician? Where did you learn that?"

"It's all over the village. And every one of these bigoted souls is pleased as punch now that the village 'foreigner' is labeled a murderer! I tried to see him but that dumb-ox police chief wouldn't even let me talk to him. Matt, there's nobody to help him."

Stiffly, I headed for the door.

"Matt, are you sleep-walking? Didn't you hear what I told you?"

"I'm not deaf, but when I get up the first thing I *have* to do is take in the john. I'll be back in a second."

Washing was torture and I couldn't find a thing in the medicine chest for sun burn. When I came out, Bessie had tea bags in a pan of hot water, cotton, and a bottle of baby oil. She told me to stand still and began dabbing my red skin with the tea bags. It embarrassed me to have her touch me all over so I cornballed, "Thinking of serving me with sugar?"

"No, with an apple in your mouth. Tannic acid is the best thing for a burn." She started in with the oil next.

"Matt, we *must* help Jerry. I'm certain they're making him the whipping boy, the goat."

"Do you know why they think Jerry did it?"

"Jerry is a diabetic, or on the verge of becoming one. He felt ill last night and called the Doctor, who bawled him out for drinking beer. A neighbor heard them shouting at each other. Mrs. Barnes claims

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Jerry's was the only call the Doctor had last night. There, that's enough oil, now get dressed. I have supper working."

Bessie had hamburgers, potatoes, and a cup of strong spicy tea waiting. She sat down opposite me and lit a cigarette. When I asked when she started smoking, she said, "Only when I'm nervous. Matt, you have to *prove* Jerry is innocent."

"Me?"

"You're a policeman and the only one who can—and will help him. You know he's being framed."

"Bessie, honey, because he's your *landsman* doesn't make him innocent. They must have something else on him beside what you've told me."

"They don't! You can almost feel the sigh of relief in the village now that he's arrested—they all hate him."

"You sure he's arrested or merely held for questioning?"

"Oh—I don't know the legalities . . . Matt, what are you going to do?"

"Go back to sleep. I'm on . . ."

"Matt, I'm serious!"

"So am I. Bessie, no matter what you may think, people are rarely framed for murder. At least not in New York State. I'm on vacation, not to mention that I have no business here as a cop."

"Matt, I'm counting on you. You're the one who started this murder business, you just *have* to help!"

"Bessie, be sensible. I acted like a horse's ass this morning, playing the big cop. It's . . . well . . . like a matter of professional ethics. Suppose Roberts was in New York and tried playing cop—they'd laugh him out of town, if they didn't boot him out of the station house. Actually, as a Peace Officer, I have no more authority over Roberts than . . ."

"Matt, you're spouting about ethics like this was a debate, a bull session. A man's life is at stake!"

I nibbled at the hamburger. "Easy Bessie. You say go out and solve a murder like it was the same as going to the store. I mean, exactly what do you think I *can* do? I'm not a detective; all my life I've been a plain old beat cop. The truth is that except for a couple of busted store windows and petty house robberies, I've never taken part in a real crime. Jerry will get a lawyer, a chance to prove his inocence. Damn it, Bessie, what I'm trying to say is: I'm not sure I can help him or . . ." I let the rest of the sentence die, turned away to give Matty a piece of hamburger.

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I saw disgust and shame in Bessie's eyes. "I hate to say this, Matt, but you're an old maid. Jerry is a good man, doesn't that matter to you? I suppose if he was a lousy cat with a broken leg, you'd run to . . ." She held her face in her hands and began to weep.

I'm a sucker for tears—any kind. I went around the table and put my hands on her shoulders. She hugged my waist. "Okay, Bessie, I'll see what I can do. But don't expect me to work miracles, be a super sleuth."

She wiped her face on my shirt. "Matt, I'm sorry . . . about calling you an old maid. You're like Jerry—a good man. I know you'll solve this. I just know!"

"Yeah." It sounded like nothing. "Let me have the keys to the car. I'll see what I can get from this alleged Chief of Police." My fingers were stroking her hair; it was very soft.

Bessie insisted I wear one of Danny's windbreakers, which was too big for me and I knew I looked comical as I parked in front of the Harbor's main building. I was hoping Roberts would be out. He wasn't. He was behind his desk sucking on a big cigar, and from the sneering expression on his hard face I had the feeling Roberts had been waiting for me. The sight of him got my dander up, making it harder for me to apologize for sticking my nose into his business. Roberts boomed, "If it isn't Peace Officer Lund! I suppose you heard the news?" The sarcastic 'Peace Officer' bit didn't help my mood.

I relit my pipe and sat in the chair beside his desk. "Yeah, I heard. I know this sounds kind of dumb—this morning I was talking up because of the kid and now, well, my daughter-in-law is Greek, you see, like Jerry, and she wants me to . . ."

"How come you let your boy marry a Greek?"

That ended any explanations I had in mind. I puffed on my pipe and stared at this big young handsome son-of-bitch. He puffed too—puffed out his chest, said, "Not bad for a hick cop; murder in the morning, an arrest in the afternoon."

"I never called you a hick cop, Roberts. Yeah, that was fast work, how did you do it?"

"Common sense. We checked with Mrs. Barnes on the Doc's night calls. His last one that night was at Jerry's house. Mrs. Ida Bond—she lives across the road from Jerry—she heard the Doc bawling Jerry out for drinking beer and Jerry telling him to leave him alone. She is ready to swear she heard Edward, Doc Barnes, shouting, 'Then I won't be responsible for your life,' and Jerry answering, '*And I won't be responsible for yours.*' That's the exact words. Naturally

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when we questioned Jerry he denied the killing, but did admit he had some words with the Doc. Claims he was home all night, but living alone . . . that ain't much of an alibi."

"You arrested him on *that* evidence?"

Roberts waved a long hand at the smoke in the air. "Sounds good to me: two men have an argument and later one of them is found murdered."

"Find any fingerprints?"

"Didn't look," he said calmly. "First off, being out in that rain all night, hardly be any prints or tire tracks. Then, we were so sure it was an accident . . . I mean, the undertaker was already working on the body when you convinced me it had to be murder. But I got all the evidence I need."

"Come off it, Roberts," I said, not blaming him for holding out on me. "Your evidence won't stand up in court."

He blew a cloud of lazy smoke, watched it drift up to the ceiling. "If it doesn't, Jerry's acquitted." He leaned across the desk, lowered his voice. "Between you and me, being a diabetic old Jerry could plead he was in a state of shock, sort of nuts, get off with that."

This was the screwiest cop ever! "Anything missing? Wallet or money gone, any signs of robbery?" I asked.

"Nope. Made a careful check with Mrs. Barnes. Everything's there. This isn't any robbery."

"What time was the Doctor at Jerry's house?"

"Around 9:30. Jerry phoned him just before 9. Mrs. Barnes says the Doc was peeved at having to make a night call. And before you ask what time the Doc died—I'll tell you. Medical Examiner puts it around 11 P.M. So that fits."

I was fed up with this hot air. I got to my feet. "Jerry has a lawyer?"

A shrug of the heavy shoulders—and it wasn't padding either. "He must have plenty of dough, been living like a miser all his life. He can get himself a good one. He's over at the Riverside jail—that's the county seat."

"Think I can see him?"

The handsome face tightened. "Look, it's an open and shut case."

"Can I see him?"

Roberts stared at me, his eyes narrowing. There was a silent pause while he made a fist with his big right hand, balanced it on his left palm for a second, examining it. Finally, convinced he still had all his fingers, or something, he looked at me again, asked, "What you making a production of this for, Lund?"

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"No production. I merely want to see that he has a lawyer, cigarettes, understands his rights."

Roberts opened his fist, slapped the desk—lightly. "You should know it isn't up to me. Go to the jail in the morning, if it'll make you feel any better. Only if you're still on this Peace Officer kick, remember I'm in charge and you'll do what I say or . . ."

"You're the one making a thing of it. I told you Jerry is a friend of my daughter-in-law and . . . eh . . . I'm only doing this as a friend."

"Suit yourself, friend. But don't let me trip over you."

"Thanks." I zipped up the floppy windbreaker on the way out.

I didn't feel like rushing back to more of Bessie's needling. There was a dreary-looking bar across the street. I went in and ordered a beer. The bartender was a tall man with the kind of shoulders and arms that came from doing something a darn sight harder than mixing drinks. He had weak eyes and his thick glasses gave his fleshy face an unreal look. There were a couple of kids, about 18 or 19, hanging around a pin ball machine. They were drinking straight gin, or maybe it was vodka.

I bought a bag of potato chips and sipped my brew slowly. Bessie said Jerry used his mumbling dialect on everybody in town—did that include the Doc? If so, how could a woman across the road understand what he was yelling? And Barnes—now why would a doctor be shouting at a patient? The whole dumb village was acting screwy: first they didn't want to call it murder, pass it off as an accident. Then they tagged Jerry and from the way Roberts acted, he seemed to *want* an acquittal.

". . . I hear he's a big time private eye." This was followed by a nervous giggle from the pin ball crowd. I looked into the dirty mirror behind the bar; the three punks were staring at me with crocked eyes. One of them said, loudly, "I heard he's FBI. I ain't hit an FBI man yet, but there's always a first time."

I felt a chill, which had nothing to do with my sunburn. These were all husky young fellows, and in shape. There was more mumbling and I finished my beer as fast as I could—without making it look fast, nodded at the barkeep and headed for the door.

I'd reached the sidewalk when they came out, all of them swinging. I blocked a wild right and punched one of them in the eye. A smack on the chin dropped me. I sat on the walk, dizzy, and trying to think of a lot of things—like curling up to protect myself from kicks. And if the bastards had busted my bridge work.

A pair of long legs in black leather puttees passed me. Roberts moved

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nicely. He grabbed the nearest kid and slapped him across the face. A hell of a slap, the mouth went out of shape for a moment and his hair shook. When he let go, the punk went reeling down the street. The others started to run but Roberts took two steps and backhanded another across the nose, making it bleed. He was damn good, always had his right fist cocked for real trouble.

He reached down and lifted me to my feet. "You okay, Lund?"

I put a finger in my numb mouth; my bridge work was still in one piece. I said, "Yeah." He looked doubtful.

"I'm okay." I started toward Bessie's car. Roberts walked along with me. "They thought you were here to look into a hot rod accident. A kid was killed in a race, in a car stolen out of state, from New Jersey. Was some talk about the Feds coming into the case. They were just scared."

"They weren't scared enough." Feeling returned to my jaw.

"Kids used to do a lot of cop-fighting down here. Matter of fact, that's why I was first taken on, as a special, to handle the kids. Sure you're okay, Mr. Lund?"

I got in the car and said I was fine. Hell of it was, Roberts really sounded sincere.

"It won't happen again, Lund. You understand, one of those things. I'll drop in on the kids, at their homes, in an hour or so, put the fear of the law in them. I don't stand for cops being slugged here."

"Sure, they were liquored-up. Thanks."

"Anyway, I'm glad you socked one of the clowns. Handle yourself good for a guy your age."

I waved and drove off, wondering if he was kidding me; not sure. I couldn't make this hick burg, couldn't figure it even a little.

CHAPTER THREE

IF THERE'S ONE THING I hate it's to be awakened suddenly. Bessie shook me awake and said, "It's seven o'clock Matt."

I sat up in bed and thought maybe I was lucky: she could have started at 5 A.M. She began talking about Jerry and I told her to hold it—she didn't want to mention murder in front of the kid. Maybe she knew I was sore, when I came out of the bathroom she had some of this thick Turkish coffee waiting and a few cups of that put me

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back in a normal mood. Andy took the boat kit I'd brought him to a friend's house and by eight, Bessie was driving me to Riverside. Her pretty face looked tired. I asked, "Didn't you sleep last night?"

"How could I, worrying about Jerry?"

"Honey, don't carry this *landsman* stuff too far. Frankly I don't get the play here, but even Roberts doesn't seem to think a court will find the old boy guilty so . . ."

"No Matt, that won't be good enough."

"What won't?"

"He's an old man, we can't even have him stand trial. Don't you see, it would kill him, be the final victory for End Harbor. We have to prove he's innocent *before* the trial."

"Bessie, come back to earth. You say we 'can't let him stand trial' like it was up to us. There's only so much we can do."

"You know how damn biased the Harbor is toward him."

"Aren't you just as biased, in his favor? At this point we don't know he didn't kill the Doc—we merely think so. Now let's get some facts, find out exactly where we stand, before we do any more gum-beating."

"Of course. And I'm very proud of you, father-in-law, for helping poor Jerry."

"What the hell, looks like a rainy day anyway," I said, not entirely kidding.

"You louse!" she cried, hitting me with her knee. "Just for that I won't buy Matty any liver for supper. What enjoyment do you get from that fat-assed cat? All he does is sleep."

"At least he doesn't talk much, or . . ."

She cut me off with a four-letter word and drove the rest of the way in silence.

At the Riverside police headquarters they flatly refused to let us see Jerry, since we weren't relatives. I got the sergeant-in-charge aside and showed him my badge. He said, "You must be the joker who started all this. I worked out of the 130th Precinct in New York for a couple of years myself—harness bull. This is a screwy case, nothing against this Greek that will wash in court."

"Think he'll be indicted?"

"Are you kidding? You know these grand juries, do anything the D.A. asks. We told Roberts he had a watery case but he seems happy."

"I know, but why?"

"Tell ya, in these villages, what the hell, the 'chief' is lucky to be

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taking home fifty bucks a week, and no civil service or pension. Not much cushion money around, either. Roberts is a glamour boy and beside showing off that fancy uniform all he does is chase a speeder now and then, maybe lock up a drunk. So he's all puffed up about 'solving' this murder. Hey, how come you're interested in all this?"

"He's a friend of my daughter-in-law. You know how it is, she expects me to act like Dick Tracy because I have a badge. I just wanted to be sure Jerry has a lawyer, cigarettes."

"Well, I don't see no harm in your seeing him. We can't even understand what he says—when he talks. I hear he won't have either of the two lawyers in End Harbor. I'll give you fifteen minutes with him. As for the babe, your daughter-in-law, that's out."

Bessie was sore as a boil when I told her she couldn't go in, but finally agreed to do her shopping and meet me outside the station house in a half hour.

The cells were pretty good, modern and heated, with a sink and toilet in each one. The cell block attendant was a sleepy looking fat character. When he started to recite the rules, I told him I had the same job in New York, and he said in a bored voice, "Then you know the score. Don't cause me no trouble, Pops."

"Pops," and the fat slob looked less than a dozen years younger than me.

Jerry seemed to have doubled his age overnight, his body was shrunken, his face more wrinkled, his color splotchy. He didn't get up and I sat on the clean bunk beside him, explained about Bessie wanting to see him. He muttered, "Mista, whata you want with me?" We were back to the dialect.

"Jerry, I only have a few minutes with you, so cut the crap and talk straight. Have you money to hire a lawyer?"

"Money? What gooda is money? Whatta good any lawyerman do me? This all one frame."

I shook him. "Talk straight! What do you mean, a frame?"

Rubbing his hand across his face he asked quietly, "What do you want to know, Mr. Lund?"

"Did you do it? Now wait, understand, I have to know that for sure."

He shook his head slowly, as if it took a great effort. "The Doc and me, we never rubbed together well, especially when I first came to the Harbor, but I always admired him. Town never had much use for him either. No, of course I didn't do it. Do you believe that?"

"I wouldn't be sitting here if I didn't believe you. Exactly what

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happened the night before last? What were you fighting with Barnes about?"

He straightened up. "What fight?"

"A Mrs. Bond, who lives across the street from you, claims you shouted at the Doc, something about you wouldn't be responsible for his life. And the Doc was yelling at you. Did you say that to Barnes?"

"Well, yes. Because my garden has always been better than her's, all the time that Bond woman spy on me. I said that to the Doc, but only as a joke."

"If it was such a joke, why were you shouting it?"

"Ed—Doc Barnes—used a hearing aid but it wasn't working so good. Maybe the batteries were weak. So we were talking loud. Now you talk as if you don't believe me, Mr. Lund."

"Look, I have to ask questions because I need the complete picture if I'm going to be of any help to you. Now tell me what happened that night!"

Jerry shrugged. "Nothing happened. I keep telling you that."

"Damn it, Jerry, wake up! Can't you understand this isn't a game or a . . . Look, tell me everything you did from the time you dropped me off at Bessie's cottage, that night."

"That was the last train, so I went home for my supper. I had a couple bottles of beer. After I eat I'm listening to the radio—music—and I begin to feel sick, real dizzy. I know an attack is coming on so I phoned the Doc. I'm feeling miserable until he comes over and he raises sand because I'm off my diet. The Doc was sore at me. I told him, like I always do, to fix me up, eating is one of the few joys left in life for me. He said if I didn't stick to the diet, he wouldn't be responsible for my life. So making a wisecrack, I tell him nobody but God is responsible for life. He didn't hear. I yelled I wouldn't be responsible for his life either. He gave me an insulin shot, and a pill to make me sleep. Edward said he had to see the old goat, then he could get some sleep himself. Then he left."

"What's this 'old goat' mean?"

Jerry shrugged. "That he had another call to make. I didn't ask him."

"What time did he leave?"

"Maybe 9:30, maybe 10. The pill made me sleepy and I went to bed at once. In the morning I took some ladies to the train, you saw me at the station, and there I hear about Edward being killed in an accident. It upset me, like I said, I admired him. In the afternoon they come and arrest me. You see, it's a frame. They kept asking can

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anyone prove I was at home all night. That's silly—they right well know I live alone."

"Did you tell Roberts about the 'old goat?' "

"Sure. I told him exactly what I told you."

"Where's the medicine bottle the Doc gave you, the stuff that put you to sleep?"

"What bottle? He gave me one pill."

I tried to think, but my mind was going in circles. "I don't think they have anything that will stand up in court, a jury will find you not guilty and . . ."

"But in the eyes of the Harbor I will always be a murderer. Bad enough for me in town up to now. . . . Even if I'm free, I will have to leave the Harbor."

"Jerry, you either have to fight this or give up. First step is to get a lawyer, a young kid. A Riverside lawyer. A kid will act like a legal-eagle because an acquittal means good publicity for him. You want Bessie to find a lawyer for you?"

"All right, I'll get one."

"Okay, but do it at once. Did anybody in End Harbor, or in any of the other burgs around here, have any reason for killing the Doc? Did he have any enemies, any at all?"

"No, no. Edward is—was—the only doctor in the Harbor, a big man in the town."

"But you just told me the Harbor didn't have much use for him either."

"I don't like to repeat . . . gossip. They keep this quiet because Barnes was the former mayor, an important church man . . . but he told them all to go plum to hell, even his wife."

"Told them to go to hell about what?"

"You know how the town got its name, End Harbor?"

"I suppose because it's at the end of the bay."

He shook his head. "A long, long time ago a tribe of Indians lived there, part of the Shinnecock nation, called Endins—sounds like Indians. When I first came to the Harbor there were still several Indian families, but they moved away. Only one family left, Joe Endin and his daughter Jane. Jane grew up to be a fine girl but there was nothing for her in the Harbor, no job, no man to marry—because she's Indian. All she can do is work as a maid. Her papa died and she still hung around, maybe she's 23, 25, a very lonely young woman. Then the story starts that she is going with Doc Barnes. That was about ten years ago. This is all gossip, you understand, but

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this I do know, Edward trained her to be a nurse and took her on all his calls. His wife is mad as the devil and the town is buzzing with whispers. After a year or so, Jane stops working for the Doctor. She still lives in the Harbor but works in a factory in Hampton. But the Doctor, he keeps seeing her, you can usually find his car parked in front of the Endin house a few times a week."

"Jeez, this changes everything, gives the wife a motive for killing."

Jerry patted my knee, like he was talking to a kid. "Of course, you don't know Priscilla Barnes. A very quiet and meek woman. Be wrong to accuse her of murder. If she stood the cross of gossip all these years, when Jane was working in the Barnes home—Edward had his office in the house—why should she get angry now, when the affair, if it was that, seemed to be dying out?"

"Some people carry a long fuse and you never know when . . ."

The attendant rapped on the bars. "Time is up, break it off."

I stood up. "Need any cigarettes, cigars—anything, Jerry?"

"No. I'm comfortable."

"Think hard: the Doc didn't give you any hint as to who the 'old goat' might be? Didn't say in which direction he was driving to see the goat, for example?"

"Nope. He said it in passing, you know."

"Let's go," the cell block attendant said, opening the door.

"Whatsa the bigga rush with you?" Jerry mumbled.

"When you get that lawyer, I want to see him. And don't talk to anybody but the lawyer."

"I am glad you came, Mr. Lund," Jerry said, getting up and shaking my hand. "You made me feel better—a little."

Bessie was sitting in the car, puffing on a cigarette, bags of groceries on the rear seat. She started pumping me with questions and I said, "Relax, Jerry is fine. Bessie, the whole Harbor is lying in their carefully brushed teeth."

"But why? It's such a peaceful community—I know they dislike Jerry, but to frame him for murder—"

"Let's get going, I have a lot of work to do. The 'why' is the usual old one: your pillar of the community, Doc Barnes, was carrying on for years with an Indian woman, a descendant of the tribe that founded End Harbor. Name is Jane Endin. You know her?"

"No. We tourists rarely get to know anybody but the storekeepers. You think this Indian woman killed him?"

"She had more reason than Jerry. Not to mention the Doc's wife, who's been having the affair flung in her face all these years. But this

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explains Chief Roberts' attitude—from the go he knew darn well it was murder but all he can think of is the Harbor doesn't want a scandal. In a small town everybody is close friends. He's even willing to call it an accident. Then enter the clown—me—who has to shoot off his big mouth. Now the Harbor *has* to call it murder but they find a custom-made patsy—the Doc was known to have visited Jerry, the village bogeyman."

"But to put Jerry on trial for his life, Lord, how can they be so heartless!"

"Honey, that's the angle, the reason Roberts doesn't give a fat damn his evidence is weak and circumstantial—he *knows* Jerry won't be found guilty. So what? The mess is over, hushed without any scandal. Honey, I'm going to knock over their can of peas, bust this wide open!"

"Matt, I knew you would!"

"You didn't know a mumbling thing, and neither did I. Frankly I only went to Riverside this morning to go through the motions. That's all changed now—I *know* he's being railroaded. Being an ordinary patrolman, a harness bull, I've never looked upon 'police work' as anything but a job. But like everybody else I sometimes had day-dreams, about being a real detective. So in my old age I'm finally going to give it a try."

The odd thing was I said this rah-rah pitch cold sober, actually meant every word. Listening to Jerry I'd decided to goose End Harbor wide open, expose all the petty scheming and hatreds, a kind of concentrated form of big city vice. If I was doing it for Jerry, I was also doing it for my own ego. And all the time I knew I was show-boating: a fourflusher—for the case was a set-up and I would knock it over with the speed of a fiction private eye.

Bessie wanted to know what I had in mind but I merely puffed on my pipe with great self-importance, told her I couldn't discuss it at the moment, but would need the car.

She said I could have it and even managed not to talk all the way back to the cottage. I gave Matty his lunch in three seconds flat and with Bessie watching with admiring eyes I dashed off—the great detective about to run himself ragged.

Roberts was out but the boy-cop was holding down the desk. He told me Roberts was working. I asked, "Did you know the Doc was deaf?"

"Yeah. Everybody knew that, he had one of them transparent hearing buttons stuck in his ear."

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"You know why Jerry was loud-talking him, why the Doc was shouting back? The hearing device wasn't working that night."

"That so? There wasn't enough left to say if it was working or not. Who told you all this?"

"Jerry. Didn't you fellows question him at all? He claims Barnes had another call to make—which means Jerry wasn't the last person to see the Doc alive."

Junior fooled with his red tie, almost yawned in my face. "Guess that would change things—if you can prove it. We grilled old Jerry but who can understand the way he talks? To my way of thinking, this proves Jerry guilty—for he'd sure as hell make up a story about the Doc having another call. Mrs. Barnes says he only had to see Jerry."

"She might say anything. Jerry claims the Doc told him he was on his way to see the 'old goat'. Any idea who that would be?"

He showed a mouth full of teeth in a big grin. "Offhand that could be anybody over the age of 30. There's a summer population of around 1800, not to mention the 1468 actual residents of the Harbor, and at least half of them are over 30—you plan to question about 1500 people, mister?"

"I might, to save a man's life," I snapped, knowing I was wasting time: the End Harbor police weren't interested in finding the killer. "Where does Jane Endin live?"

"Out on Bay Street, past Tide Beach. So you know about her?"

"I sure do," I said, starting for the door.

"All this rushing about will tire you out, man your age."

I spun around. "Don't let that pansy uniform go to your head, sonny, I've put in more years as a cop than you have weeks!"

"Easy, mister. I'm trying to save you work. She ain't home. We been trying to locate her since yesterday."

I almost swallowed my tongue: a possible suspect leaves town and they sit on their butts! "Know where she works in Hampton?"

"Sure, at the watch factory. We phoned, she wasn't to work yesterday or today. What you want to see her for?"

"To ask who she thinks will win the pennant!" I said, walking out.

He called after me, "Hell, I can tell you that—the Giants."

Outside I sat in the car and got my pipe going—watching the people on the main drag—trying to figure my next step. I knew what I had to do but I didn't want to rush it, the way I'd just done with the uniform-happy boy. One thing was for sure; I couldn't shake this village loose by myself.

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I made a list of all the names I'd heard since coming to the Harbor—Jerry's, Doc and Mrs. Barnes, Chief Roberts, Jane Endin, Mrs. Bond, Larry Anderson, Pops (but what was his name?) even copied the names from the store windows on Main Street—obviously the big apples in the village. Getting a handful of change I put in a long distance call, which would also take it away from the ears of the local operators, to Nat Reed in New York. Nat and I shared a post for a brace of years before he quit to end up in a cushy spot with a credit agency.

Credit outfits have become the largest snoop agencies in the country outside the government. They have complete files on millions of people. I gave Nat a fast rundown on what I was doing, the list of names.

As I expected, he said, "Matt, you know I can't give out info like that. It's only for our subscribers."

"I know—that's why I'm wasting dough on a long distance call."

Nat sputtered a little before he said, "Okay, I'll send you whatever we have, get it out today."

"Put it in a plain envelope. Seal it good."

"Things that bad?"

"I'm playing it safe, wind blows a lot of ways out here."

"I'll mail it special delivery." He laughed. "Going in for police work as a hobby in your old age?"

"Isn't it about time? Thanks, Nat."

I drove along Main Street until I reached the picture window white house set back on a neat lawn with Doc Barnes' shingle hanging from a post made to look like an old whaling ship's mast. I rang the doorbell and a stout woman with a healthy face and heavy grey hair in a big bun topping her head opened the door. A plain worn short red dress showed off arms and legs that belonged on a football team.

"Mrs. Barnes?"

"No, no, I'm only staying with Priscilla in her hour of need. I'm Mrs. Jenks."

"Can Mrs. Barnes see people? It's important."

The bright eyes in the large face turned suspicious. "You're new in the Harbor, ain'tcha?"

"Yes. My name is Matt Lund. I'd like to speak to Mrs. Barnes."

"Well you certainly don't look like a reporter. They've been ringing our phone . . . well, I keep telling them excitement is bad for shock. My son is a doctor, too, you know. Practicing in Brooklyn. Edward urged him to come home and share his practice but Don thought

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there wouldn't be enough for two doctors to. . . . Say! You're that city police inspector!"

Gossip was promoting me fast. "Your son going to take over Doctor Barnes' practice now?"

"I should hope so. After all, Edward would have wanted it that way—he practically insisted Don go to Med School. This is what I've been dreaming about—Don back in the Harbor. . . . But this is no time to talk about such things."

"Maybe not. Will you ask Mrs. Barnes if she'll see me for a few minutes?"

"Priscilla is piddling around in the kitchen. This morning she was busy with the funeral arrangements. You'll only upset her and she needs her rest."

There was a moment of silence while we stared at each other. Finally she snorted, "Hmmm! I'll ask Priscilla," and shut the door in my face.

A frail little woman with an unhealthy waxen skin and thin white hair opened the door a moment later. Her delicate features and mild eyes added up to a washed-out look, and the mouth was merely a faint pink line. She was wearing a white apron over a black dress. The apron was even starched. Her voice was a shock; it was hard, almost brittle, as she said, "I'm Mrs. Barnes."

"May I come in?"

She seemed to wince, as if I'd hit her. She closed her eyes for a moment and I had this feeling that the last thing she wanted was to talk to me—or see me. Then she opened her eyes, stared at me boldly, and that harsh voice said, "Of course. Excuse my manners."

I followed her into a spotlessly neat living room: a mixture of old fashioned heavy furniture, a big new TV, and two modern plywood chairs. Everything was just-so. She was a real Dutch housewife, as they used to say in my day. She pointed toward a stuffed leather chair and I sat down while she perched on the edge of a plain maple stool. Her legs were awful—all bone. I fooled with my cap as I said, "I realize the strain you're under, Mrs. Barnes, and I wouldn't be here . . . if a man's life wasn't at stake."

"I understand, it's your job."

"It is, if you believe it's every citizen's job to uphold the law."

"I respect the law, I always have. But you might as well know this: I don't—I can't—believe Edward was murdered."

"Then all the more reason to aid a man under arrest for his murder. I'll be blunt, Mrs. Barnes, do you really want to find the murderer

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of your husband? The rest of End Harbor doesn't seem to . . ."

"I can't stand the sound of that word—murder!" Her hard voice rose in a wail, brought the picture of an icicle to my mind. I noticed the swinging door that led to the kitchen move slightly—where Mrs. Jenks was at her listening post. "Ed—Doctor Barnes—devoted his life to the health and welfare of people, who would want to kill a saint? Why, why?"

"Do you think Jerry killed your husband?"

"No. I refuse to believe he was killed by . . . anybody! It was an accident."

"I understand Jerry phoned the Doctor at 9 P.M. Did you take the call?"

"Yes, that is, we both answered. Edward had this stranger in his office, but as I picked up the extension, Edward answered, so I hung up. But I knew it was Jerry."

"What stranger?"

"Why some elderly man, a Mr. Nelson, drove up to ask if Edward knew about a man he was looking for, an old army friend, a Mr. Hudon . . . or some name like that."

"Why did he think your husband would know him?"

"Mr. Nelson was driving along the island and his friend was supposed to be living in the Harbor, at least he sent Mr. Nelson a card from here a few years ago. Since Mr. Hudon suffered from gall stones, Mr. Nelson thought Edward might have treated his friend. It's all rather complicated and of no importance."

"It may be of great importance. Did you say Mr. Nelson was an elderly man?"

"Oh yes. But very tall and well preserved for his age. Edward had never heard of the other man, so Mr. Nelson left."

"Does Chief Roberts know about Mr. Nelson?"

"Yes. I mentioned it to him."

"Are you certain Doctor Barnes had never seen Nelson before? Did he act excited, or upset after Nelson left?"

"Edward never put eyes on the man before. I gathered that Mr. Nelson was merely passing through the Harbor. Really, Mr. Lund, I don't see the point of all this."

"Jerry claims the Doctor told him he was on his way to make another call, that he had to see the 'old goat'. That might have been this Nelson."

"That's ridiculous, Nelson wasn't a patient."

"Have you any idea as to who the 'old goat' might be?"

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"No." She suddenly batted her ear nervously with a finger. "And Edward had no other calls except Jerry's."

"How do you know, Mrs. Barnes?"

"Sir, are you doubting my word?"

"No ma'am, merely checking. I don't have to tell you that if I can prove Doctor Barnes had another stop to make after he left Jerry, it might set Jerry free. Are you positive there wasn't another phone call after Jerry's?"

"Edward never said a word about it and he always told me where he was going, in case of an emergency. I was sitting here watching TV and after Mr. Nelson took his leave, as the programs were changing, Edward came out of his office and was rather angry. He hated night calls. He said there was nothing wrong with Jerry if he'd watch his diet."

"How do you know he wasn't angry over something this Nelson said?"

"I know. I mean he wasn't really angry. Lands, Mr. Lund, this Mr. Nelson merely dropped in to ask some information. Only reason Edward took him into his office was to check his files for the other man's name. As Edward left, a few minutes later, Mrs. Jenks came over to watch TV. She stayed when I became nervous, that is, when it neared midnight and Edward didn't return."

"What did you do, when he didn't return?" It was neat, the way she set up an alibi without my even asking.

"What could I do? I thought he'd been detained but I was surprised he hadn't phoned me. Around midnight I took a sedative and went to my bed."

"Let me get this straight; while Nelson was with your husband, Jerry phoned. Then Nelson left, and Doctor Barnes left, cursing Jerry."

"Indeed not! Edward never uttered a harsh word in his life."

"Excuse me. Did Nelson and Doctor Barnes leave together?"

"No, no. Really Mr. Lund, I find this very tiring, going over and over the same thing. Some minutes after Mr. Nelson left, Edward put on his hat and coat, then went back to his office—for his bag, I imagine. A few minutes later he walked through this room, looked at the TV show for a moment, kissed me, said he wouldn't be late."

"You were listening to TV—suppose the phone had rung in those few minutes, are you certain you would have heard it? Was the TV on loudly?"

She poked her ear again, hesitated. "I did have the set on fairly loud. I'm a trifle deaf in one ear."

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"Then you can't be certain the phone didn't ring again?" I said, feeling excited.

"Well . . . no."

I stood up. "Thank you for your time, Mrs. Barnes. One more thing—was your husband's hearing aid working that night?"

"Of course. He had several and would have worn another if anything had been wrong." She got to her feet. "Mr. Lund, you're new to the Harbor, never knew Edward. He was a tender and loving man. I've been sickly all my life, couldn't give him children. Yet he was always considerate of me, never complained, although he dearly wanted a child. Everybody spoke well of him, he was a man in a million, without an enemy in the world. He gave unceasingly of his time and money. I'm telling you this because there's absolutely no reason for a man like that to have been murdered, it's . . . it's . . . just impossible!" She worked her ear over for a moment. "I'll do everything in my power to help poor Jerry."

"That's most commendable, Mrs. Barnes. Did you tell that to Chief Roberts?"

"I did. Landsakes, everybody knows Jerry is touched, but he barks, doesn't bite. I've never known him to harm a soul."

I thanked her again and at the door I asked, "Do you think Jane Endin would have harmed Doctor Barnes?"

The pale lips formed a slit after she said, "Get out!" The words came with bullet force.

It was raining again and I sat in the car, slowly cleaned out my pipe and lit it.

Suddenly Mrs. Jenks came running out of the house, a shawl half over her big head. When she saw me, she opened the car door, pushed in. "Drive me to the drugstore! I could break your neck, upsetting Priscilla like that!"

I wanted to remark that I hadn't the slightest doubt but that those arms could break my neck. I drove off without saying a word, then I asked, "Where is the drugstore?"

"Straight ahead on Main Street. Where did you think it would be? You made her sick."

"Sorry. But I have to ask certain questions and. . . ."

"Why?" she shouted. "Why do you have to ask *any* questions? This isn't your town!"

"Unfortunately murder isn't the property of any one town. Do you want to see Jerry sent to jail?"

"If he killed Ed Barnes he ought to be hung!"

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"The 'if' is why I must ask questions. Like, where were you that night, Mrs. Jenks?"

"Me?" It was a mild explosion.

With a movement amazingly fast for a woman her size, she suddenly put an immense sandaled foot on top of mine, banging it down on the brake, causing the car to screech to a stop. "You dirty old skunk, stop this car this second!"

She opened the door and jumped out. I wiggled my toes. She shook a fat fist at me, "If I tell my son what you just said—I hate to think what he'd do to you! And for your information, I was home all night after I left Priscilla's. Why, I even sat up until three in the morning, watching out the window to see if Edward came home. Then my younger boy, Mike, got up and made me go to bed. There, you dirty-minded ferret!"

I watched her walk away in the rain, the jelly-flesh on her wide backside shaking. I drove to Hampton, letting the talk with Mrs. Barnes cook in my mind. The 'evidence' against Jerry was getting downright silly, and there were at least four leads that made a damn sight more sense than Jerry's alleged motive. Nelson, whoever he was, could be the 'old goat'. Mrs. Barnes had reason enough to kill her husband, so had Jane Endin if what Jerry said was true. Nor could I rule out Mrs. Jenks—she might have wanted her son to practice in the Harbor awfully bad.

Any lawyer could prove Mrs. Barnes was far from positive the Doc didn't make two calls that night. I could take the stand and disprove Roberts' "evidence" on the basis of my conversation with Mrs. Barnes. Roberts might be another lead too . . . even if he was a young lard-head, this must be hard for him to swallow . . . unless he had other reasons beside hushing up a town scandal to let things go.

I felt very pleased with myself, detective work was only using common sense—I was almost sorry I hadn't been more ambitious when I first got on the force. Of course, tracking down Nelson would be a hard job, probably mean a lot of digging into the Doc's past—I had this hunch they knew each other years ago. That would require spade work—I didn't even know his first name. The thing to do was to take a crack at what I had on hand—at Jane Endin.

You'd never guess Hampton was only seventeen miles from End Harbor, everything about the town cried money, solid, father-to-son folding money. The large houses and estates looking like something you see in the movies, the swank shops—branches of famous 5th Avenue stores, the expensive cars—even teenagers zipping around in

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foreign jobs. I had to ask a couple times before I found the watch factory—a new brick building covered with vines and flowers.

People rarely question a police badge, the gal at the reception desk didn't when I flashed my tin and said, "Peace Officer. I'd like Miss Jane Endin's home address."

"This is something, the police phoned yesterday and this morning asking for her. She lives in End Harbor."

"I know that, but she hasn't been home," I said, thinking I was wrong not to have tried her house instead of taking the boy-cop's word for it. "Did she have any address here in Hampton? You know, some place to call in an emergency?"

"No sir, we only have the Harbor address for her."

"I see. Can I speak to whoever worked next to her, any close pal she has among the girls here?"

"I suppose it's about that murder in the Harbor. Gee whiz, we never have nothing here but hot rod jerks wrecking themselves." She phoned into somebody, then told me, "Girl be out in a second. This Jane in trouble?"

"No."

A young girl in a red turtleneck sweater, and tighter jeans showing off her round basketball-rear, walked up to me. When she walked the basketball was far from still. "I work next to Jane. Is she in a jam? When I saw her this morning she didn't act like . . ."

"Where did you see her?"

"On the Dunes Road. She passed in her old struggle-buggy. She didn't stop, just waved at me. Jane looked bad, like she'd been up all night." The girl had a jerky way of talking—and thinking, for she reached up to brush her close cut dark hair with her finger tips . . . and to make sure I saw her tiny pointed breasts.

"Did Miss Endin ever mention any friends in Hampton? Say some place where she might go on her lunch hour, or after work?"

"Jane ain't the buddy-buddy type. She's old, and an Indian. Last . . ."

"Old?"

"For crying out tears, I bet she's 29 if she's a day. Last summer I suggested we might take in the Pow-Wow at the Reservation. I figured her being Indian and all. Man, she near flipped, told me off. You can't figure a woman like . . ."

"What Reservation?"

She brushed her hair again, with both hands this time, to give me the full view. It wasn't much of a view. "Mister, you don't know a

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little about this end of the Island. Guess you must be a big-time dick brought in special for the murder. I know that's what it's about." She gave me a cute wink.

"Where is the Reservation?"

"Outside Qotaque there's this Indian Reservation. Every summer all the Indians living in Brooklyn and the other cities, they're supposed to return and hold dances, and all this old square stuff. I went once. It was from hunger, strictly tourist bait jive." She glanced at the wall clock. "You know I'm losing time, this is a piece work deal. Anything else?"

"That's all. Thank you."

"What they want Jane for, witness against this old Greek?"

"No, I'm merely checking."

She winked again. "You wouldn't tell me anyway. You know, you ain't what I pictured a dick looking like."

"Sorry, I left my muscles home," I said, heading for the door.

The rain was coming down harder and my back started to ache. Twenty minutes later I was in Qotaque, which was even smaller than the Harbor. A stiff wind was driving the rain and it was almost dark enough to be night. I stopped for coffee and a hamburger, got directions on finding the Reservation. I followed the directions and when I reached the Shinnecock Canal I knew I'd passed the turn-off.

I drove back slowly, the windshield wiper fighting a losing battle, and found it—not a road but a country lane with a faded wooden sign. The rain had made the dirt road into a mud rut. I inched along, not seeing any houses.

If I'd been going faster I might have made it: the car slid into a hole, or some damn thing, and stuck. I tried backing out; it was a waste of time.

I sloshed over to the bushes on the side of the 'road' to pull out a handful of branches; nothing gave except my skin. I took out my pen knife and hacked away like a cub scout. By the time I was thoroughly soaked, the rain chilling the remains of yesterday's sunburn, I had an armful of small branches. I packed these in front of the rear wheels and the car went a big fat two feet, then slid back into the mud. Locking the ignition, I started walking in the rain.

There was a turn in the mud and I came upon a couple of shacks and a store. There was a light in the store. The guy behind the counter looked more like a Negro than an Indian, although he had long white brushed hair that reached his shoulders. He was wearing a worn beaded vest over a faded shrimp colored sport shirt. He was short and

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wide. "Come for souvenirs? Fall in the mud, mister?" His voice was a rough croak and his wide mouth toothless.

"I'm stuck in the mud. Can you help me?" The light was one small bulb and the few cans and boxes on the shadowy shelves seemed terribly stale looking. In a separate showcase he had some dusty toy tom-toms, beaded belts and feathered hats, left over from the last tourist invasion.

"Ah, the mud. Washington still robs the Indian, for years we have asked for a paved road. I'm Chief Tom. I have a truck if you want a tow. Ten bucks."

"Ten bucks. That mud ambush out there your work?"

"You want tow or not?" There was an evil gleam in his bloodshot eyes. "You're blocking the road so I'll have to tow your car out of the way. Still cost you ten bucks." He pulled back his vest with a proud movement to show me a large, highly polished gold badge. "I'm a deputy, in charge of traffic here."

"Thanks for going through the motions of asking if I *wanted* a tow." I felt tired, no longer the super detective. I dried my face with my handkerchief, pulled out my pipe. It was wet. "This the Reservation?"

He nodded. "Indians dumb. Government give them land and a house here for free, but the young bucks, they leave. Maybe go into army, never come back here. Live in lousy tenements in Brooklyn."

"Sure, they're crazy to leave this paradise. You know a Miss Jane Endin?"

"What you want to see her for?" His eyes became cagey.

I flashed my buzzer but he grabbed my hand and held my badge against his. He gave me a grin full of purple gums; his badge was bigger. "What she done?"

I jerked my hand away, put my badge in my pocket. "Nothing. I want to ask about a friend of hers."

Chief Tom gave me a wise look. "You're a Federal man. Income tax trouble?"

"No. When did you see Miss Endin last?"

"Let me see . . . five, six years ago. Ain't she in the Harbor no more?"

I suppose I should have asked more questions, visited the other shacks. But my back was aching, I had a chill, and was so damn tired all I could think of was soaking in a hot tub—if I could find one. I was too weary to even haggle with him about the price. I said, "Get your truck."

He pulled a fancy white trenchcoat from under the counter that

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made him look ridiculous, carefully brushed his long hair before putting on a battered fishing cap. Locking the door, he told me to wait. A moment later he came roaring around in an old six-wheeled army truck that was so high I had to pull myself up to the running board.

Reaching my car, Tom said he would push me out. I asked if there was any way he could circle around, come up behind the car and pull me out. He told me there was another road but it meant driving miles out of the way, and he pushed cars out after every rain. I got behind my wheel and he inched the big truck forward. His bumper seemed to be on my headlights. When I shouted it was all wrong he yelled back, "Just keep her in neutral and don't worry. I push you to the main road."

He had the truck in low and I kept the door open, leaning out to see where I was backing. My car moved backwards as if it was a toy, the glare of his lights in my eyes. When the main road was in sight I signaled he could stop. At that second I went into another damn hole and his bumper came down on my lights with a sickening crash of metal.

We both jumped out. Tom croaked, "What's the matter, you crazy!" and examined his bumper—which a tank couldn't have dented. Both my headlights were smashed, the fenders dented, and my bumper was hanging.

He said, "What did you put her in gear for?"

"Who put her in gear? Didn't you see me waving?"

"I thought you were waving me on. I said I'd push you out to the road."

"You dumb bastard!" I kicked the bumper. It fell off and I picked it up, tried to shake off the mud, then put it in the back of the car.

Tom put his hand under my fenders. "They're not touching the tires, you can drive." He held out his hand. "Ten bucks."

"I'll give you the back of my hand ten times! I'll. . . ."

He suddenly grabbed my windbreaker and before I knew what the devil was happening, he actually picked me up and threw me into the mud. "Don't get yourself hurt, mister. You don't know how to drive, ain't money out of my pocket. Ten bucks please." He glanced down at his trenchcoat—it wasn't even muddy.

I sat up in the mud. I had to tangle with a muscle man, and this long haired son-of-a-bitch probably was older than me too! My behind was soaking wet. I stood up, wanted to slug him but decided he'd flatten me. Without a word I gave him two five dollar bills, got

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in the car and backed out. I headed for End Harbor, expecting to be collared any second for driving without lights.

I cooled off as I drove, paying full attention to the rainy road. I could see fairly well, there were enough cars going the other way to light up the road. I didn't stop at Hampton but pulled into a garage on the outskirts of End Harbor. A young fellow eating his supper in the office came out wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "What happened to you? New car, too."

"I ran into Sitting Bull. Tell me how bad it is. Got a rest room?"

He nodded toward a small white door. Inside I washed most of the mud off, using a lot of paper towels. When I came out the mechanic was back in the office, finishing his supper. I went in, tried drying out my pipe bowl with matches as he said, "Nothing wrong with your lights, just need new glass and bulbs. Where you heading for?"

"I'm staying in the Harbor."

He finished his container of coffee, said, "Brooklyn license plates. Well, now I know the summer has really started with you . . ."

"Aw, cut it off. Can you fix the lights now? I want to get back to my cottage."

"Can't put the glass in, but I can give you bulbs. Look, suppose you bring the car around in the morning and leave it. I'll straighten out the fenders, paint 'em, take care of the lights and the bumper. Cost you $35.00."

"Okay."

He went out to the car and put in bulbs, carried the bumper back into the shop. The lights weren't much good, but at least I wouldn't get a ticket. As I lit my pipe and started the car, he said, "That's seventy-five cents for the bulbs. Deductible from the $35.00, but payable now."

"It's touching to see your faith in your fellow men," I said, giving him three quarters.

He smiled. "I'm a union man—E. Fluribus Unum. See you in the morning, Mac."

He was so pleased with his corny wisecrack I didn't say a word, puffed harder on the pipe. There was one thing I'd overlooked—the scene of the crime. Not that I expected to find anything there *now*. I should have gone there yesterday. As a detective I was a good cell block attendant. I rolled down the window, asked, "Know where the killing of the doctor happened?"

He came to the office door, a sugared doughnut in his dirty hand. "Crazy the way people are on the morbid kick. I went out there my-

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self to have a look this morning. Follow this for about a mile and you'll see another road crossing it, wide road, that's Bay Street. Make a right turn on Bay. Couple hundred yards down you'll see a busted tree—that's the spot."

"Bay Street?" I repeated. Jane Endin lived on Bay Street—Roberts was trying hard to overlook the obvious clues.

"Can't miss it, Jack. There's a new brick house on one corner, boarded up—some rich cat who's been in Europe for last two years. On the opposite corner, toward the bay, you'll see a picket fence and a house. Not much of a house but nice piece of land. Belongs to an Indian gal."

Ten minutes later I was on Bay Street, and saw the big tree with a splintered gash in the thick trunk. Keeping my faint lights on the scene I walked around in the rain, not knowing what I expected to find . . . and finding nothing.

Turning around I drove back to the highway. I stared at the boarded-up bright ranch house. The way Roberts operated, it could have belonged to Mr. Nelson. Then I looked at the Endin house. It was a weatherbeaten two-story affair with at least an acre of land behind the low picket fence. There was an old car in the driveway; no lights in the house. I pulled off the road, decided to snoop around the house.

Of course there wasn't anything to see. A grape arbor in the back of the house, an unused chicken coop, a locked shed. On the door there was a knocker shaped like an arrow head, or maybe it was an arrow head. I looked into one of the dark windows. As I turned away a porch light came on and the door opened.

A woman stood there who made me forget all about Indians, being a detective, even about feeling tired. She was tall and straight, black hair with streaks of grey pulled severely away from her angular face. Her eyes were bright and tired, and her face came down to an overlong jaw. Her skin was creamy and she was wearing a man's grey shirt and dungarees. Perhaps she was far from a beauty, but there was a bitter, sullen look about her—like she was ready to explode with sex. I mean, she seemed about 35 and . . . well, as if she'd been storing it up all those years.

Her eyes took in my wet and dirty clothes before she asked, "What do you want?" A cold voice, proud and clear.

I took off my cap. "Excuse me, I was looking for a Miss Endin."

"I'm Jane Endin," she said. "Why are you snooping around my property?"

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CHAPTER FOUR

BEING AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE I hadn't given much thought as to the type of man Doc Barnes had been. If anything I'd pictured him a prissy sort, a bluenose. My respect for the Doc soared—this was indeed a *woman*. Then I told myself to act my age, stop the school boy crap—Jane Endin looked capable of anything: passion and/or murder.

"Why must you stare at me—so rudely? What do you want?"

"Sorry, I don't mean to be rude. I expected a. . . ."

"A tommyhawk in my hand?" Her voice was sharper than one.

"My name is Matt Lund. Perhaps you've heard of me, the New York City policeman interested in Doc Barnes' death." I went through the motion of flashing my badge.

"I haven't heard of you." Her voice became a talking-to-herself-whisper. Her eyes looked through me. She seemed dazed and when her face slackened the high cheek bones stood out.

"I've been looking for you, Miss Endin. Can we talk?"

"What have we to talk about?" She turned and started to close the door. Her hair was a thick juicy braid that went to her waist—an exciting braid.

"Aren't you interested in finding Doc's killer?"

"Killer?" she repeated, back still to me, everything about her straight and tense. "Who would kill Edward? I can't associate killing with Edward, he was only interested in healing, in living."

"Do you think Jerry murdered him?"

"*Murder?*" She spun around, her eyes coming alive again. "Jerry, the taxi man? But . . . I thought it was an accident? Who says Jerry killed Edward?"

"The Harbor police. Jerry's in the Riverside jail this second, charged with murder." I wondered where she could have possibly been not to have heard. Or was it all an act? "I'm trying to help Jerry. I don't think he did it. That's what I wanted to talk about."

"Wipe your feet on the mat as you come in."

She had an odd walk, sort of threw her legs out—and all the stiffness left her. I followed her into a living room that looked too neat to have been lived in much. The furniture was old but the walls were covered with various size abstract paintings, violent splashes of color

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that didn't make sense yet were strangely exciting. She pointed toward a maple chair with red cushions but I said I'd rather stand, didn't want to dirty the chair. She shrugged, lit a cigarette, and sat on an ancient leather chair, curling her legs under her.

I nodded at the paintings, I guess they were oils. "Very unusual."

"Do you understand them?"

"I don't know, but they give me a feeling of excitement."

She studied me over a puff of smoke.

I got under way. "Miss Endin, I'm a stranger here, a tourist. I'm also a cop. I'm going to ask you some questions. I don't mean to be rude, but I can't be subtle. I'm very tired, especially tired of the run-around I've been getting. Doc Barnes is murdered and the Harbor acts as if . . ."

"You never knew Edward," she cut in, voice clear and sharp once more. "He was a good man, considerate, no one would kill him."

"But someone did. Everybody is trying to hush the murder, pretend it didn't happen—even you are. Why?"

"Who can believe a man like Edward could be murdered?"

"Nuts. They're putting the lid on it because you and Doc Barnes have been the village scandal for years!"

She jumped to her feet, a graceful fast movement. "Leave my house!"

"I said I was going to be blunt. Your personal affairs are your own business. But remember Jerry in the Riverside jail with not a single End Harbor person caring a damn!"

"What do you want of me? I wouldn't hurt Jerry. He's one of the few people who bothered to tip his hat to me."

"All I want you to do, Miss Endin, is answer a few questions."

She sat down again, the braid coming over her shoulder like a snake. "What questions? What can I tell you?"

"The Doctor was killed not far from here; did he visit you Sunday night?"

She shook her head. "I last saw Edward on Friday. He came over to have a cup of tea and watch television. He did that every Friday evening."

"Where were you Sunday night?"

"I was here all day Sunday—painting."

"Alone?"

"Of course."

I took my time lighting my pipe, full of mixed feelings: I didn't believe her . . . and I wished to God I was 20 years younger.

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"If you're hinting I killed Edward, you're so wrong. I worshipped him."

"Excuse the bluntness, but were you his girlfriend?"

"I was his friend."

I'd heard somewhere that silence can break a person down. I wandered around the room slowly. I stared at the paintings for a moment, then faced her. She wasn't even watching me, her eyes studying the floor. "Have you any boyfriends?"

"Certainly not."

"Now Miss Endin, you're an attractive woman . . . you must have at . . ."

"I'm an Indian!" She sounded as fierce as her paintings. "Do you know what that means in a town like the Harbor, Mr. . . .?"

"Matt Lund."

"Mr. Lund, have you any idea what it means to grow up happy with a loving father, even proud that this is the land of your ancestors? Then it all changes when you're 12 or 13, the doors start slamming? The kids you played with, knew in school suddenly becoming painfully polite. No, how could you know what it means to be the only 'colored' person in a white town!"

"You're not . . ."

"I'm proud I am an Indian! And if it was a bitter pill I could take it as long as my father was alive. I never knew my mother, but Dad was a wonderful man, full of living, like Edward. I could forget the rest of the Harbor over Dad's laughter and little jokes at night as we took care of the house, the garden, went fishing and swimming. Best of all were the hunting trips and the stories he remembered from his grandfather—alone in the woods we were living in Indian country again. But—he died when I was 20."

Her voice died too. I kept pacing the room slowly, telling myself not to be a sucker, taken in by a sob story. She crushed her cigarette in a clam shell ash tray, a loud noise in the silent house. Even the rain on the roof seemed muffled. After a long wait I asked, "What about Doc, Miss Endin?"

"I nearly went out of my head when Dad died, I was so lonely. I turned to painting and that helped a little, more as I gained confidence. You know, for nearly two years I never spoke to a soul, except the store keeper down the street."

"You mean nobody in the Harbor spoke to you? Why?"

"They might nod or wave to me on the street. It was more a case of the Harbor ignoring me. Oh, for a mite Larry Anderson was friendly

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but the kind of relationship he wanted . . . seems like most white men think that's all we've been placed on this earth for."

"New York's only a few hours away."

She laughed, a short, harsh sound. "Who would I know in New York? You forget, this town is named after my family, I belong here!"

"A person belongs where they're happy. How did Doc come into the picture?"

She stroked the heavy braid coming down her side. I suddenly wondered how she'd look with all that hair undone, perhaps falling to her hips.

"About two years after Dad died I needed money. Only job I could get was as a domestic. I had headaches all the time, felt sick. One day the woman I worked for sent me to see Edward. He remembered me as a kid, was very kind. When he said I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I became hysterical, spilled all my thoughts out to him. He was shocked, and that was the start of our friendship. He taught me practical nursing, hired me to help in his office. He was interested in my painting, encouraged me. And the Harbor misunderstood, thought we were having an affair. Even Priscilla! Nobody said it openly, they respected Edward too much for that. But I could feel the snickers, the whispered laughter whenever I passed a group of men. Edward was furious, sickened. But how can you combat gossip, an unseen enemy?"

She was staring at the floor again, didn't expect me to answer—and what is the answer?

"I worked in Edward's office for over a year and a half, loved it. But I knew he was having difficulties with Priscilla over me, and she's sickly. Against his wishes—our only fight—I left, took various jobs in Hampton and Southampton as a domestic, in a factory. But Edward never stopped being my friend, fighting the town. He made a point of taking me for rides, visiting me several times a week. We read the same books, watched TV. He took me to an art school in East Hampton but I couldn't take it, they treated me like a pet, a freak. He wanted to send me to a nurses school, but I was afraid; I hadn't finished high school." She looked up, stared right into my eyes. "I'll be blunt too. If Edward had wanted me as his girlfriend, I would have been—gladly. I think he desired me but felt it would be giving in to the gossip."

I leaned against the kitchen doorway, trying to believe what she was telling me. Or had the Doc been trying to break off and she killed him? I said, "The police think Jerry was the last patient Barnes

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saw that night. Jerry insists the Doc said he was going to see somebody he called an 'old goat.' Have you any idea who that might be?"

She shrugged and I realized she had good breasts. "I don't know. It could be a real goat. Edward once raced a small boy and his dog to Riverside to save the dog's life. You see he was a dedicated man, kindness was his religion. That's why I can't think of him being murdered."

Barnes' wife and mistress sure thought alike, at least about the Doc. "Did Doc ever mention a man named Nelson, or anybody named Hudon?"

She shook her head.

"Anybody in the Harbor by those names?"

"I never heard them before."

"Where were you yesterday, today?"

Again that interesting shrug. "I heard about his death on my way to work. I felt like the time I'd lost Dad. I drove around, trying to think. I sat on the beach for hours. I couldn't bear seeing anybody. Finally I came back here late this afternoon, tried to sleep."

"You worked for him, which of his patients would he call an 'old goat'?"

"I have no idea. Hardly like Edward to call anybody that. I suppose they'll bury him tomorrow. I know he'll understand if I don't go to the funeral."

"You're in a bad spot, Miss Endin. If Jerry isn't indicted, if they need another patsy, they'll tag you."

"Me?" She jumped.

"Circumstantial evidence is a darn sight stronger against you than Jerry. You haven't an alibi, Barnes was killed near your house. They could easily cook up a motive—jealousy. Your lover was about to leave you . . ."

"Edward wasn't my lover! Let any doctor examine me!"

I was sold. Perhaps I admired the fierce way she said she was a virgin, the terrible way she said it. She could have easily used a smug tone. This was a wail of protest.

But that didn't make her innocent of murder. Could she have insisted on bed and the Doc refused? All the old saws about a woman scorned banged around in my head.

She lit another cigarette. "They wouldn't dare accuse me."

She was right about that, they'd be afraid it would blow the village apart. But why? According to her, Barnes had only tried to help her, felt sorry for her? This required a little mental cooking on my part. I

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carefully zipped up my windbreaker. "Thank you, Miss Endin."

"You understand, I want to help Jerry. But I don't know how I can."

She walked me toward the door. I asked, "Was Mrs. Barnes still upset over the Doc's seeing you?"

"It was something they never talked about. I don't believe she really knew Edward."

"Would she be so upset as to murder him?"

She stopped, stock still. "Never! Not Priscilla, she could never do that."

"I was just asking." As she opened the door and the rain hit us, I said, "You have a nice piece of land, probably get ten thousand for it."

"Are you telling me to leave the Harbor?"

I grinned. "I'm not the one to tell you anything. But there's a lot to do and see in New York, Frisco, Paris. It's a big world; you'd be surprised how tiny a speck End Harbor is. If I think of anything else, I'll call again." I held out my hand. Her hand was firm and cool.

I drove down Bay Street. It was nearly nine-thirty and I was bushed. A police car passed me, stopped. Chief Roberts stuck his over-handsome puss out as I slowed down. "Busy—busy, Mr. Peace Officer? Find any big clues, Mr. City Cop?" Satisfaction dripped from his voice.

"Only that it's raining."

He turned a flash on my battered fenders. "What happened to your car?"

"I've been running into a lot of blank walls today. Why didn't you tell me a Mr. Nelson visited the Doc the night he was killed?"

He showed all his white teeth in a grin. "I don't have to tell you a damn thing. Matter of fact I sent Nelson to see Edward. He asked me about this old guy he was looking for, I suggested the Doc might know about him, or maybe the post office. Any other questions, bigshot?"

I was so tired I told him, "Why don't you arrest yourself, Roberts, for obstructing justice?" and I drove off.

He laughed at me.

When I reached our cottage Bessie came running out and hugged me. I told her, "Watch it, you'll get dirty."

"Matt, where have you been? I've been worried sick. What happened? Did you find anything new?" Then she saw the car and: "Oh my God, you were in an accident!"

"Relax, and let me get out of these wet clothes. Andy sleeping, I hope?"

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"Of course. He waited up to show you this." On the dining room table there was a fine model of a cabin cruiser built from the kit I'd brought him. Matty, curled up on a chair, yawned and studied me with an arrogant cat-look.

"Tell me all about it. Are you hungry?"

"I could use some food, but above all I need a good hot tub but I'll settle for a shower." Going into my room I undressed quietly and even the mushy bed looked welcome. I put on a robe, watching Andy, the solid way he slept. When I came out Bessie said, "I'm making something special for you, fried chicken simmered in yogurt."

"I'm hungry enough to try anything," I said, closing the bathroom door. I stood under the warm shower for a long time and felt human again. Wearing a sweater under my robe, I got a pipe going and sat at the table, examined the boat while Bessie cooked. "Andy do this himself? Fine job."

"Matt, do you want me to explode? What happened today?"

I told her about seeing Mrs. Barnes, about the stranger named Nelson, about Mrs. Jenks, and about locating Jane Endin. I found myself talking a great deal about Jane, ended by saying, "A woman like that shouldn't ever be lonely, she looks so passionate."

Placing some food in front of me, Bessie asked, "Can you tell if a woman is passionate by her looks?"

"You can *think* she is," I said, tearing into the chicken, which was out of this world. Bessie sat across the table, drinking tea and telling me what a great detective I was. I didn't contradict her; I was too busy eating.

When I finished eating I insisted upon helping her with the dishes, although I was pooped. Bessie asked if I got the number of Chief Tom's truck. I told her, "I'll take care of fixing the car."

"Nonsense, I'm sure Danny's insurance covers it. Send him the bill and license number of the truck."

"I was too mad to think straight. I didn't get the number. But I suppose I can get it tomorrow."

"Want me to ask this Jane over for supper tomorrow?"

"Oh for—cut it out. She may be a murderer."

"I like what you said about thinking a woman can look passionate. Do I look hot?"

"Will you stop it? I'm tired." Sometimes Bessie embarrassed me with her talk about sex. When I was growing up girls didn't talk like that.

"I think it's a high compliment. Do I look hot, Matt?"

"Like a firecracker—as you very well know."

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She gave me a fast hug; the nice warm living odor of her body. "Want to know something, you've always looked the same way to me. For true."

"Stop it," I said, afraid I was blushing.

"I mean it. I often wonder, what do you do for a woman, Matt?"

"What's that supposed to be, clever, sophisticated talk? Well, it isn't. And it's none of your business." I felt as uneasy as a kid listening to his father trying to explain the facts of life.

"Don't be prissy, and I'm certainly not trying to be clever. Why if you looked thin I'd ask what you were eating. A person needs sex the same way they need food and shelter."

"When I get in need of a woman, I find one!" I snapped, lying.

"This Miss Endin sounds like something you ought to get next to."

"What's the matter with you? I'm an old man."

"Only in your mind. Dan and I worry about you. He wants you to marry again. Matt, you're hard and lean, homely in a way that appeals to women. You're not 60 yet, most men your age start chasing chippies. But you, if you'd stop being an old maid, forget that silly fat-assed cat and . . ."

"I've had enough of this damn talk. I have no complaints about my sex life, never had!" I didn't realize I was talking so harshly until Bessie backed away. Changing the subject I asked, "Did you feed Matty?"

"The pig ate two helpings of liver. What do you plan to do tomorrow, about Jerry?"

"Oh, there's a lot to do," I said, patting her cheek as we both grinned at each other. "I have to see what I can find out about this Mr. Nelson, maybe talk to him. And I want to learn more about Mrs. Jenks' son, maybe snoop into Priscilla Barnes' background. I'm going to examine Jerry's car—if I can. Probably have a long talk with the lawyer Jerry hires. I'll be busy—busy all day doing. . . ."

A car pulled up in front of the cottage. We both looked out at the rain sparkling in the headlights. Bessie groaned. "I hope this isn't the summer plague—unexpected guests."

There were slow, tired steps on the porch until the door opened. Jerry stood there, blinking at the light. He looked haggard, sickly.

For a long moment we didn't speak, then I whispered, "Lord help us—how did you break out?"

"I came by to thank you both," Jerry mumbled. "Now I go to my house. I sleep a long time. Yes, I need sleep."

Bessie raced over and kissed him, said something in Greek. He

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nodded and touched her face with his fingers, his eyes began to water.

"How did you get out?" I asked, trying to keep my voice down.

"Out?" He blinked stupidly, wiped his eyes with the back of a dirty hand. "It's over, they set me free. The District Attorney, the judge, the policemen, they told me to go. They found the real killer. Didn't you hear? They found the body of a man in a car out at Hampton Point. They told me he killed the Doctor. Some man named Nelson."

CHAPTER FIVE

I WAS AS STUNNED as if I'd stopped a haymaker with my chin. "Nelson is dead? Who killed him?"

Jerry shrugged. "I do not know. Art Roberts and the police at Riverside were very excited. I'm not feeling well, so when they said they were sorry and I was free, I ask no questions and let them take me home. Now I come over to thank you, then I will go to my bed."

Bessie asked if he wanted something to eat, was he really sick, and Jerry said a good sleep would fix him up. I questioned him about Nelson but he didn't know a thing. I'd been tired before, now I felt exhausted, beat and old.

Bessie said she would drive him home but Jerry said it wasn't necessary and pulled his glasses from his shirt pocket, as if proving something.

When he left Bessie danced over to me. "Matt, you did it! You're the best policeman ever!"

"I did what?" I felt like a terrible fool. Roberts must have known about the Nelson business when he stopped me before. Matt the big detective—the first grade horse's end!

"If you hadn't stirred things up, they never would have looked farther, Jerry would still be in jail. You're wonderful!"

I shook myself. "I suppose that's one way of looking at it. Honey, I'm going to turn in. I'm tired."

Bessie blew a kiss at me. "Don't act so blasé, you're tremendous. In a few hours you've solved everything. Say—I have to phone the news to Dan."

"Well be careful, the lights aren't much good."

"Oh no. I'll walk to the Johnsons down the road, use their phone. You get your sleep."

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I went to bed and started tossing and turning. I kept telling myself I *had* done a good day's work. What the hell, it was rough working *against* the police, even against hick cops. But I couldn't buy that; still felt like a fool. I'd been so tightly smug . . . and all the time this comic-cop, Roberts, had found the killer. Or was this another cover-up? It did seem too convenient—no scandal, not even a phony trial for Jerry, a dead stranger did it! And who killed Nelson? Had Roberts gunned him to make the collar? That was far-fetched but the way they worked things around here. Well, it wasn't my business any longer—it never had been.

I had a headache. All Bessie's fine chicken stuck in my gut like a dead weight. For a time I lay in bed and listened to the rain, then I took a couple soda pills to settle my stomach, went back to the sack. Bessie came in, humming; I heard her wash up, go to bed. About a half hour went by and I was no nearer sleep. Without knowing exactly why, I felt defeated.

So I said the hell with it and took a long swig of brandy, damn near threw it up. But a few moments later I went off into a good sleep.

I had a number of small dreams. In the last one I was out in a storm, the rowboat rocking like mad. I seemed about to capsize when I opened my eyes. Andy, in a bathing suit, was shaking me. The sun was coming through the window.

I sat up, rubbed my face. I still felt lousy. "What time is it? Finally got us a nice day."

"Yes, Grandpa. Think we can get in some more fishing? It's almost 7:30."

"Seven-thirty? Bessie said she'd let me—Damn it, Andy, did you wake me up to tell me about fishing?" I asked, angry.

"No sir. There's a policeman outside."

I put on a robe and nodded to Bessie, washing up in the bathroom. She should have closed the door, the sun silhouetted her figure against her short nightgown.

End Harbor's one police car was parked outside and a cop I'd never seen before, a stocky joker about 30, waved a letter at me. "Special delivery."

"A special?" Then I remembered, Nat and his credit report. "You fellows deliver mail too?"

He was looking me over; I guess I didn't look like much. "I heard a lot about you—big city cop. Yeah, when we're cruising around we deliver specials and telegrams."

"They nab whoever killed Nelson?"

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"It was a suicide. Found the gun right in his lap, I hear. He had a gun permit, too."

"What makes him the Doc's killer?"

"Found the Doc's scarf in the glove compartment. Doc was wearing the scarf the night he was killed."

"Roberts said nothing was missing!"

"Mrs. Barnes didn't remember he was wearing a scarf until we—I mean the Hampton Point police—found it."

I wanted to ask more questions but told myself to mind my own business. I thanked him for the letter, wondered if he expected a tip, went back inside.

"What's the special about?" Bessie asked. She'd changed to a bathing suit.

"Some info I asked for. You done in the john?"

"Sure."

I went in and washed up. When I came out she said, "Well, at least open it."

"The case is over."

"It's special delivery, open it!"

I opened it, showed her Nat's report. Bessie said, "That's all? I'll make breakfast, then we'll spend the day on the beach. Andy, take out the milk and juice."

I got dressed and glanced at Nat's report. He didn't have a thing on Jerry, or on Jane Endin. Doc Barnes was rated as a highly respected citizen, former mayor, his income was over $15,000 a year. Nat had information about his background, college, war record—but none of it interesting. Larry Anderson also had a good rating, although his income averaged $4,000 or $5,000. Art Roberts only made $2,800 a year but somehow owned his house and car. The few other names I'd picked at random were either not listed or considered poor credit risks.

Nat wrote:

> In general, End Harbor is a two-bit town, business-wise. There's a few retired people with dough, and of course the doctor. This Anderson seems to be the only local merchant making a go of things. He owns his house and land, free and clear, never asks for credit, pays his bills promptly. Of course most of the people own their homes, handed down from father to son, but everybody is money-poor.
>
> There's been a small real estate boom in End Harbor and considerable building as a result. However the contractors are all

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from Hampton and other towns. Odd there isn't a building contractor in the Harbor. That should be a sound business if you're thinking of investing. So is real estate. And where did you get your pile from? I always thought you were an honest slob. Or did you finally bring in a horse?

Matty got up, stalked into the room, stretching and yawning. I cleaned his box, washed my hands, and fed him. I had to coax him to eat. He took a few sips of his milk, started to walk away. I ran my fingers through his fur for ticks. He must have been as irritable as I was—he swung on me.

During breakfast Andy had to tell me—in detail—how he'd built the model boat. Then he started asking when we'd go fishing. I was far too restless to sit in a rowboat. I made the mistake of saying I had to see about fixing the car. Andy immediately wanted to know what had happened to the car. I said something about getting stuck in the mud on the Reservation and that started another flood of questions. I snapped, "Andy, it's too early in the morning for so much talk. I've had a hard night."

"Doing what, Grandpops?"

"Oh Andy . . . leave me alone."

The kid sulked until Bessie told him to cut it out before he got walloped. No sooner did the kid quiet down than Bessie started in on me.

Danny had assured her his insurance covered the damage. If I wanted to wait until he came down on Friday, he would take care of things.

Andy cut in with, "Anybody knows you should be towed out of mud, not pushed."

"Nonsense. How about the time I was pushed out of the sand with the old car?" Bessie asked.

I finished my coffee quickly, all the petty talk increasing my nervousness. I finally got in a word, told Bessie I was merely going to get the Indian's license number, leave the car at the garage.

I undressed and put on my bathing trunks, then dressed again. Matty was back on my bed and I poked him and he hissed at me. I don't know what it was, but driving toward Hampton I felt depressed as hell.

I found the Reservation without any trouble, didn't bother going into the shack they called a store. Chief Tom's truck was parked outside and I got down the license number, and his full name from the fly-specked beer license in the dirty store window.

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Danny's car looked bad in the daylight and I was glad to drop it off at the garage. The mechanic I'd talked to yesterday was there and I got quite a shock when I saw Art Roberts changing from cover-alls into his snappy uniform. He called out, "Wait a minute, Lund, I'll give you a lift back to the Harbor."

"What are you doing here?"

"Working. This is my cousin, Hank," he said, nodding at the other mechanic. "When will Lund's car be ready?"

"Not for a day, maybe two. Phone me in the morning, Mr. Lund," this Hank said.

Roberts carefully dressed, paying a lot of attention to his hair. A mirror was his best friend. When he saw me watching him he winked, said, "I have to look my best—going to Edward's funeral in an hour. Come on."

He had a snappy white MG and as I sat in the bucket seat, I said, "Some car."

"Keeps me broke. Bought it two months ago from some society kid I pinched for drunk driving. Got a good buy."

We drove for a moment before he said, "Suppose you know about Nelson. We have everything but the motive. Hampton Point police are having the L.A. cops look into Nelson's life."

"How come he had a gun permit?"

"Don't know. He was a retired bank guard, maybe they keep their rods. Pretty good work for hick cops, isn't it?"

"Stop that 'hick' routine. I never called you one."

"Sure, but you're thinking it: I'm a hick cop in a gaudy uniform. Okay, I am. And I like it! Anyway, the case is settled. I guess now you'll stick to fishing and stop throwing your badge around."

He gave me a patronizing grin; with his looks, the uniform, and the MG, Roberts must have been God's gift to women—in the Harbor. He said, "You won't believe this, but I'm damn glad you were so nosey. Matter of fact, I actually learned something, working with you."

I laughed. Working *with* me!

"I was a little steamed at first when you showed me up, my saying it was an accident." We turned into Main Street, stopped in front of the Municipal Building. "Want me to run you up to your cottage?"

"No, thanks, I could use a walk." I crawled out of the MG, straightened up, and hesitated.

After a moment I said: "You know, I was thinking it could have been an accident. Suppose Barnes saw a drunk driver coming at him, had to swerve to escape hitting him, went off the road and was killed

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when the car hit the tree? The drunk could have stopped, dragged the Doc out of the car, then panicked when he saw he had a stiff, taken off. Perhaps later the body was run over by a hit and run driver. Too much of a coincidence, two lousy drivers, but it's possible. I mean, was possible."

Roberts had real dismay on his big face. "Jeez, you ain't starting to open this all over again, Lund?"

"Nope," I said. "Just talking."

Roberts sort of jumped out of the car, brushed his uniform. "Good. I've had all the action I want for one summer. Let the Hampton Point police dig up the fine details." He held out a heavy hand. "Good knowing you, Lund."

I shook his hand. "Sure. Whenever you're in town, drop into the precinct house. Boys be jealous of your uniform."

He smiled. "I might do that."

"I work out of the . . ."

"I know where you work. Checked on you. You're a cell block attendant. Guess you'll be retiring soon."

I didn't know if he was sarcastic or not when he said cell block attendant. "In a year or two."

He sighed. "Wish I had a pension to look forward to. Guess I'll have to die in harness. Well, have to get back to the office. Hope you have decent weather for the rest of your stay."

We shook hands again and as I walked toward the cottage I wondered whether Roberts was a ham or sincere. In either case he still was a jerk. But with his looks and set-up be odd if he didn't take himself seriously. It was getting hot and I was sweating by the time I reached the beach.

Bessie was sitting under a striped umbrella with some other young women, all of them in brief bathing suits. She introduced me with a big build-up, great detective line, gave me a sandwich and a cold drink. The women made a small fuss over me, asked a lot of dumb questions. All the talk made me jittery again.

Andy came out of the water, said he was ready to go fishing. He had the model of the cabin cruiser under the umbrella, wanted to try it in the water. Bessie said it wasn't meant for that, he should know better. She seemed to be picking on the boy, or maybe it was my nerves. They argued about the boat. I finally cut in and told him he could take the model along but to keep it in the rowboat.

Then she started on me, warning me to be careful of the sun. I said okay and that I was going into the swamp grass to take off my

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pants. The women all laughed as Bessie said, "Oh for, Matt drop your pants here. My God!"

All this chatter didn't help my nerves or blue mood and I was happy when Andy and I finally got into the boat. He rowed and gave me the glasses to wear around my neck. The tide was starting to come in and when we reached the breakwater we drifted. Andy caught a large hump-back sea porgy that damn near snapped his rod. He was so excited he didn't nag me to fish. The sun felt good, took the last of yesterday's chill from my bones. I was content to glance around the harbor through the glasses: they almost put me aboard the big yachts.

For no reason, before we drifted out of view, I put the glasses on Jane Endin's house. Of course I didn't see a damn thing, except her car was still in the driveway. I examined a few more big boats, the shore at Haven Island across the bay. We were drifting in front of Anderson's house and up on the Widow's Walk Pops was laying on the cot, Larry Anderson sitting beside him, reading the paper. I turned the field glasses on the Endin house for a last look. Jane was out in the backyard, wearing a loose fitting loud purple robe, hair hanging down her back like a thick black brush stroke. She was hanging small towels on a line. The towels were full of bright red splotches—undoubtedly the rags she used to wipe her paint brushes.

Andy yelled, "Grandpa!" He was standing, his rod forming a rigid U as the line jerked.

I moved over to help him and out of the corner of my eye I saw two quick flashes of light from the Walk atop Anderson's house. For a second I thought they were shots, waited for the shotgun sounds. No sound came.

It was just a big ugly skate on the line and I held the rod while Andy cut the hook out of the wing, his face full of disgust. Was Anderson signaling somebody? As I gave him back the rod, I turned and put my binoculars on the Widow's Walk. Anderson was standing up, talking to Pops. Larry was holding something in his right hand I thought was an automatic, then I realized what the light flashes were —he'd been watching us through binoculars and the flashes had been the sun striking the lens.

Anderson seemed to shrug, as if having an argument, then got his left hand under Pops and lifted him up. He got his right hand, still holding the glasses, under the old man's ankles, carried him downstairs.

There was something phoney about the scene, exactly what I didn't know. Andy said he wanted to row out into the bay. I took the oars: exercise might quiet my restlessness. I told him to troll. As I rowed

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I faced the top of Anderson's house. Why was he watching us through the glasses? But that wasn't what struck me wrong.

I told myself to stop it. What the devil, with a view like that, he'd spend a lot of time looking through binoculars. Why assume he was watching us—could have been looking at the yachts? I put muscle to the oars, we were going against the tide . . . and suddenly I knew what was wrong—the way Anderson had lifted the old man—he'd done it with *one* hand! His right hand, holding the glasses, had been used just for balance.

Strong as Anderson seemed, he'd hardly lift a man with one arm. It sure was a careless way to carry a sick man. And Pops—the floppy straw hat over his face, arms under the blanket. . . . Maybe that wasn't a man up there but a straw dummy!

I told myself that was plain silly, but couldn't get the idea out of my mind. What would be the point of carrying a dummy up to the Widow's Walk, the reading act? After all, suppose Pops only weighed 90-100 pounds, a guy built like Anderson could carry a 100 pound sack of potatoes in one arm—maybe. Still, for a man recovering from a heart attack, you'd think he would have put the glasses down, used both hands to carry Pops?

Nuts, I thought. You're not on the case. You're not on anything but supposedly enjoying fishing. Keep it at that or you'll make a fool of yourself—again.

I rowed out near some red and black buoys and we tossed out the anchor. We were in real deep water and I baited up but we didn't catch a damn thing. I picked up the boat model, it was even a better job than I thought—the kid had fashioned tiny furniture out of cardboard and matches. When I said he was right smart Andy said, "Heck, I didn't do *that* part. Jenny Johnson did it."

"Your girlfriend?"

"What? Jenny is going on 15—she's old."

"That's not . . ." I began, and stopped. How old was Nelson? How old was Doc Barnes? Judging from Priscilla, who looked about 58, the Doc must have been 65, or so. Hell, of course he could have married an older woman . . . But suppose he was 65, anybody he called an 'old goat' would have to be at least 70, 75, or even 80. That could be Nelson, if he was that old . . . and it could also be Pops!

"Andy, how old is Pops?"

"Gee, I don't know. He looks awful old."

"As old as I am?"

"No, way older. Heck, I betcha Pops is at least . . . 40."

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I stared at the kid, then grinned—at myself. He'd started me on the idea, what more could I expect. "Andy, how old do you think I am?"

"I don't know," he said, his voice uncomfortable. "37?"

"Come on now. Your daddy is going on 35, I think, so I have to be at least 20 years older than he is."

"Why?"

"I just have to," I said, not wanting to explain the birds and the bees to the kid. Pops was the man I had to talk to, and right away. I tried to think of a way of going in now, without the kid asking a million questions.

"You could be only 15 years older than Dad."

"Okay, let's forget it. This is sure a swell model. Next time we go shopping, I'll buy you another kit. In fact if we row in . . ."

"Great, Gramp! Make it a helicopter kit."

"I've had enough sun and I'm starved. Think we can make for the beach?"

To my surprise the boy said, "Anytime you wish." He poked at the pail with his toe. "I wanted to go in before, show Mom my big porgy. Can I row?"

I gave him the oars, slipped on a shirt and got my pipe working. When we came within sight of Anderson's house I put the glasses on the Widow's Walk. Pops was on the cot again, blanket and all. The hat was covering most of his face and he was still wearing the tan shirt. But he seemed to be holding a newspaper up on his stomach. Then I saw him *turn* a page, adjust his hat!

Matt Lund and his great deductions! The only straw dummy was me. The hell with playing detective—I'd had it.

Back on the beach I had a sandwich and some warm soda. After showing off his fish, Andy and another kid took it down the beach to clean. I curled up in the shade of the beach umbrella, listened to Bessie's small talk with the other young women, watched some tots busy making sand pies. I completely forgot the 'case.' I felt so relaxed I even dozed off for a few minutes.

Then Bessie shook me awake and soon had me digging clams with my fingers, squatting in the shallow water with the women. I managed to find a few. Bessie had a couple dozen small ones down her bosom, in fact all the girls had 'clam bras' as they called it.

When the tide came in high enough to make any more digging impossible, Bessie sat on the beach and smashed clams together and ate them. I skipped that—the fresh clams looked too gritty and snotty. I

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curled up for another nap but didn't complain when Andy said it was high enough for swimming. I fooled in the water with the kids. When Bessie stood up and shouted it was five, time to go home as she had a special meat pudding to make . . . I was completely pooped, glad to drag my tired rear toward the cottage.

When we reached the cottage I went around to the back, with Andy, to hang out the beach towels. He asked how soon we'd buy the helicopter kit and . . .

Bessie screamed. A hell of a scream.

I dropped the towels, damn near fell over Andy as we rushed around front, into the house. Bessie was standing in the doorway, pointing, her face full of horror.

Matty was on his back, his four feet sticking stiffly up in the air. He was laying on the table top, next to a dish of food. One glance told me he was dead.

CHAPTER SIX

ANDY ASKED, "Is poor Matty sick?"

I finally took my eyes off the cat, looked coldly around the room. I was frightened, but most of all I was too angry and too upset to speak.

Before I'd been grandstanding for the boy, maybe for myself, doing Bessie a favor, or perhaps having a little something going for the sake of 'justice.' But that was all over. Now I was just plain goddamn burning mad.

Andy asked, "What's the matter with Matty? If we give him some warm milk . . .?"

Bessie put an arm around the boy's fat shoulders, told him softly, "He's dead, Andy. He took sick and died and he's . . ."

"Gone to Heaven? Mom, do cats and dogs go to Hell, too?"

"Keep still, Andy." She turned to me, her eyes troubled. "He is dead, isn't he, Matt?"

Sure, I knew he was dead at first glance. But I stepped over and poked his stiff legs with my finger, stared into the glassy little eyes. I was putting on an act for Bessie. My eyes kept working the room, waiting for any movement or sound behind the doors, in the other rooms. But he wouldn't be dumb enough to hang around. If he'd

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been down for real action, he wouldn't have bothered with my cat. The room looked okay, not a thing disturbed.

Andy was asking, "But Mom, how did he die? Did he eat some of the stuff in that plate? Looks like there's some of it on his mouth."

"I don't know," Bessie said, starting for the table.

I grabbed her shoulder, told her, "Don't move. Did you touch anything when you came in?"

"No. Soon as I opened the door and saw Matty, I yelled. I don't understand how I could have been so careless as to leave those vegetables out of the refrigerator. It isn't like me to . . ."

"What's in the bowl?" I asked, my eyes still covering the room.

"I was going to make *keftethes* for supper, so I . . ."

"What's that?"

I must have been snapping the questions at her, for Bessie sort of blinked and backed away from me as she said, "It's a . . . eh . . . fried meat ball. But there isn't any meat in the dish—just some vegetables I intended to saute first—tomato paste, peppers, mushrooms, olives, herbs and . . . Obviously the heat must have turned the food and Matty ate some and got ptomaine and . . . Oh Matt, I know how fond you were of the beast . . . I'm sorry I was so careless, really!" She was on the verge of tears.

"Stop it, Bessie." My voice was hard and curt; I knew I had to simmer down, cool off and use my head. "It wasn't your fault, you didn't do anything to Matty."

Andy said, "Gee, think what would have happened if we had eaten the food. I bet . . ."

Bessie nodded, her face a sudden sickly white. "Matty saved our lives. But—even if it has been a hot afternoon, why should vegetables spoil *that* fast?"

There was a moment of silence. I was trying to think a few steps ahead. Then Bessie said, "Matt, will you take . . . him . . . away? I'll clean up and . . ."

I told her, "Bessie, I want you to stay out of the house, for awhile. You and Andy eat out."

She shrugged. "Well, if you wish. We'll change and eat in the village." She started for the bedroom.

"No! I want you both out right now!"

"In our bathing suits? Please, Matt, while I realize how deeply you felt about the cat, I said I was sorry about the accident but . . ."

"Will you stay the hell out of here!" I heard the roar of my own voice and Andy's shrill, "Granpops!"

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I suddenly relaxed, got my nerves somewhat under control. Even tried to smile at Bessie as I took her trembling hand, told her, "Honey, don't you see, I'm not only thinking about Matty—he's dead and gone. This wasn't any accident. This is a warning."

"A warning? About what?"

"An attempt to frighten me off the Doc Barnes' murder."

Bessie tried to hide the anxious look that slipped across her soft face. "But Matt, that's over, solved?"

"The killer thinks I'm still on the case, didn't fall for that Nelson suicide thing."

"Matty ate some bad food, that's too bad, but aren't you going overboard trying to connect a simple accident with . . .?"

"Bessie, Bessie, are you blind? You know what a fussy eater Matty is—was. You commented upon it several times. He wouldn't have eaten that food—I've never seen him jump on the table to steal food in his life! Don't you see, this is a plant, and a clumsy one at that, to scare . . ." I saw Andy staring up at me with big eyes—and bigger ears. "Andy, without saying a single word to anybody about what's happened, run over to the Johnsons or whoever has a phone, and call the police. Just tell Roberts I want him up here pronto."

"Yes sir!" the boy said, taking off like a sprinter.

I waited until I heard him running down the road. "Bessie, honey, this isn't any joke—it's damn serious. The killer came around to put the fear of God in me. He found Matty. Suppose he'd found you or Andy?"

Her face said she still didn't believe me. "Matt, doesn't that sound rather—fantastic? The heat spoiled some food and Matty ate it . . ."

"That's exactly what he wants us to buy—well, no sale! The killer has been riding his luck high, but with Matty he made his first mistake. He couldn't know Matty's eating habits, that Matty would never leap on the table for food."

"Now Matt, be reasonable. I mean Matty could have . . . *He*? You know who the killer is? Why Barnes was killed?"

"I don't know the *why,* but I have a hell of a strong idea as to *who* did it. Take Andy over to the Johnsons and stay there for the night. Or until I call for you. I have a lot of work to do here: fingerprints and other clues. Okay?"

"Oh Matt, you're not making much sense. I think you're . . ."

"Dammit, honey, what do you know about murder? Listen, at least humor me, even if you think I'm an old fool!"

"Matt, you know I don't think that. I mean, it's simply that . . .

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All right, I'll wait for you at the Johnsons. Can I at least take some meat out of the refrigerator to cook over there?"

"No. After I have it analyzed, I'm throwing out every bit of food here. Forget food, you ate enough clams to last you a week. Honey, just turn right about and get. And don't worry."

She giggled nervously. "Now you tell me—don't worry! I'll be waiting for you at the Johnsons. Matt, please take care—don't do anything foolish."

I nodded, watched her cross the porch, go down the steps. It suddenly came to me how right she was: the chips were down and I'd damn well better be a good detective—no more second guessing.

I walked through the house slowly. Things seemed okay. But then he hadn't been hunting for anything—except me. I returned to the table and Matty. There didn't seem to be any skin or blood sticking to his claws. Yet I couldn't see him being manhandled without a fight. His mouth was wide open in a sort of gasp and some of the tomato-red food was stuck in his throat. I sniffed at the bowl, the food smelled spicy and good. I took another sniff, bending so low the tip of my nose touched the mess. I jerked my head back, laughing aloud like a goon—the food was cold! I stuck a finger in: it was all cool—proving Bessie *hadn't* left it out on the table. There wasn't any doubt, it had been deliberate.

There wasn't anything to do until Roberts showed. I brushed away a fly buzzing Matty, washed up at the sink. I went outside, 'locking' the screen door. It wasn't a lock, merely a catch.

I dropped in on the three cottages nearest ours. No one had been home in the afternoon—they'd all been at the beach. But he could have easily checked that first . . . seen me on the sand too, or out digging those damn clams.

The entire End Harbor Police motor pool was parked in front of the cottage—Roberts leaning out of the radio car. He waved a lazy hand at me. "Nobody home. What's all the excitement about, now?"

"Come inside," I said, 'unlocking' the screen door. He got out of the car, straightened his shirt, followed me in. When he saw Matty on the table Roberts whistled, pushed his hat back on his head, asked, "Ate some ant poison?"

"No, he was killed."

"Got to be careful leaving these insecticides around. Too bad. What you want to see me about, Lund?"

"What kind of fingerprint equipment do you have here?"

"Not much—actually nothing to speak of. They've got a complete

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outfit up at Riverside, of course, and I think Hampton Point. Why?"

"Why? To see if the killer left any prints."

Roberts pulled at one of Matty's stiff legs. "What killer left what prints?"

"The guy who killed my cat. I think he also killed Doc Barnes and maybe Nelson. It's obvious."

Roberts gave me a queer look, as if I was nuts. He sat down on a chair, fanning his face with his fancy cap. I asked, "What's the matter with you? If there were prints on the chair, your big ass has smeared them."

"I'm far from getting the message, Lund," he corned. "Send it to me slower. Now what about the cat?"

I told him about coming home from the beach, finding Matty dead, added, "But it's all a clumsy job. First off, the food was cool, meaning it hadn't been spoiled—that it was taken out of the ice-box recently and poison added. Secondly, it must have been forced down Matty's throat, he never in his life ate off the table. It was done to scare me off."

"Scare you off what?" Roberts asked. His voice was sarcastically polite.

"Come on, Roberts! Off the Barnes' killing."

"Lund, you can't be starting that again? *The case is over.*"

"The killer doesn't know that! Listen to me, Roberts, before I was sticking my nose in for no real reason, but from now on I'm in with both feet. That's *my* cat!" He still was looking at me as if waiting for the punch line of a gag. The hell with you, I thought. You won't get off those glamor-pants, you're too much of a jerk.

He got up. "Talk sense, man, you're basing a lot of wild talk on what? That you *think* the cat would never jump on the table. You know how curious cats are, and he might have been very hungry, so he ups and eats some of this spoiled food and . . ."

"Dammit, it isn't spoiled! Stick your finger in the stuff now, see if it feels like it's been out all afternoon."

Roberts touched the mess with a thick finger, said, "Yeah, does feel cool." He cleaned his finger tip on the table cloth. "Let's start again; maybe he choked on a bone or . . .?"

"And maybe somebody is being murdered while we're gassing!"

"You're not sure how the cat died—why don't you ask a vet before shooting off your mouth about murder?"

I was too mad to even get riled. "Where can we find an animal doc?"

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"Nearest one is in Hampton. You see what he says and then... Your car is still in the shop. I'll drive you there."

"Thanks!" I got Matty's basket, gently placed him in it. I couldn't bend his legs, so I left the top open. I put the bowl in a big sauce pan, held that in my left hand and took the basket under my right arm, said, "Let's go."

Roberts nodded at my trunks. "Your legs aren't that good. Ordinance against walking around in swim trunks—even old ones. Get dressed."

I slipped on my cothes, wondering how much more of this patronizing 'humoring' I could take. Roberts carried the pot out to the car as he said, "I'll have to stop at the station, tell 'em where I'm going. Kind of late—best we phone the vet and see if he's around."

I didn't say a word. When we pulled up in front of the 'police station' I had cooled off enough to admit Roberts was at least trying to work intelligently. I should have thought of seeing a veterinarian. I should have used my head instead of my temper.

About ten minutes later Roberts came out, waved to a couple of passing girls before he told me, "It's after six—the vet shut at four. Wife says he's on his boat fishing, won't be back until late."

"Tomorrow will be too late. Where can I get this food analyzed?"

"We haven't a lab and the county lab at Riverside will be shut. Doc Barnes would have been our man. Guess Jessie—the druggist—might help us."

"Think he's out fishing too?"

Roberts gave me a stupid grin. "Let's walk across the street and see."

The druggist turned out to be a serious-faced kid of about 26 or so, wearing a loud yellow sport shirt and Bermuda shorts. We went to the back of the store, waited while he made a soda for an old lady. Then I told him we wanted to know what had killed Matty, showed him the dish of food. He sniffed at it, rubbed some between his slender fingers. He ran water over a spoonful of the stuff, washing away the red tomato paste. He held up a small white sliver. "I don't have to be a research chemist to spot this—piece of toadstool. There's a quantity of mushrooms here and at least one of them is a toadstool."

He handed it to Roberts who said, "That makes for a simple answer, Lund, your daughter-in-law picked wild mushrooms and..."

"She buys her mushrooms."

"Lucky you—got a good lawsuit. Hope she got 'em at the supermarket."

"I doubt that, Artie," Jessie the druggist said. "Store mushrooms

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are cultivated and there's little chance of a toadstool mixing in. Besides, this type is a cinch to spot . . ."

I cut in with, "What would have happened if we—I—had eaten some of this? Would it have caused death?"

"You understand, I'm not a toxicologist, so this is far from an expert opinion. There are various species of poisonous mushrooms, or toadstools, as they are commonly called, and I imagine some are quite deadly. However, judging by the structure of this sample, it's a local variety. I used them for doll umbrellas when I was a kid. I believe you'd have to eat a far larger quantity than could be found in this plate to possibly cause death. But there's enough here to have made you miserably ill for several days."

I nodded. "One thing more, Doc, wouldn't . . .?"

Jessie gave me a solemn grin. "I'm not a doctor."

"But you're a country lad and maybe you know about animals. Wouldn't an animal by instinct leave a toadstool alone?"

"I couldn't say. I suppose an animal might know food was poisonous by the smell, but mushrooms are odorless. Notice how the cat's neck is swollen and the large, almost abnormal amount of food in the throat, as if the food was forced down his throat." He gave me a suspicious glance.

"But Jess, couldn't the swelling be caused by the toadstool making the cat sick?" Roberts asked.

The druggist turned to Roberts. "That's possible. Say, Artie, what's this all about?"

"Nothing," I said quickly. "Thanks for your time, Mr. . . . Jessie." I picked up Matty's basket and the pot of food. Roberts followed me out to the police car, opening the door for me. I told him, "I'd appreciate it if you'd drive me back to the cottage."

"Why sure, I always give door to door service," he said, starting the car. "Well, guess you're convinced now it was an accident."

"Accident? How often have you had a case of toadstool poisoning in the Harbor?"

"Never heard of any, but they do happen," he said, glancing at a car making a brake-screeching turn off Main Street, muttering, "Dumb kid drivers."

"I'll tell you what happened. The killer came to our cottage with a toadstool while we were at the beach, found the food in the ice-box, cut in the toadstool. He figured after eating the food we'd get sick enough to pack up for New York. I'd be off his back. Then he saw my cat, thought he had a better way of making sure his plan worked

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fast—forced food down Matty's mouth and left the bowl beside him on the table."

"You're going off half-cocked, Lund. All that is only what you think."

I patted Matty's basket. "I didn't think up this!"

"But you can't be positive that . . ."

"I'm positive!"

"Look, all we know is the cat ate a toadstool and died. That doesn't prove a thing. You heard Jessie, he wasn't certain about how the cat died. If you think the cat was deliberately killed, I remember hearing your daughter-in-law wasn't keen on him. And her boy—some kids get a kick out of hanging dogs and . . ."

"Cut it. I've had enough talk."

"What the hell do you expect me to do? If the cat was deliberately killed, so what? I'm not the ASPCA, killing a cat isn't any crime. As for this being part of the Barnes business, old man, you're way off your rocker."

We finished the ride in silence. He helped me into the cottage with the stuff, planted his rear on a chair again—his favorite hobby. I wondered what he was hanging around for. I knew I was wasting valuable time talking to the big dope. The toadstool told me all I wanted to know. I asked, "How old was Barnes?"

"Around 63. I have his exact age in my files. Had a nice funeral for Ed today. Worked out fine."

"You mean Jane Endin didn't show. How old was Nelson?"

"71."

"And Pops?"

Roberts shrugged. "Never could count that high. This a quiz program?"

"It was, up till now. Roberts, do me one favor, give—or sell—me a handful of .38 shells." I touched his polished belt lined with bullets. I knew there was little chance the hardware store carried them.

Roberts couldn't have jumped to his feet faster if a shell had goosed him. His eyes actually narrowed as he asked, "What for?"

"For my empty gun."

"That tears it, Lund! You've been a wild hair from the moment you came to the Harbor. Pack a gun and I'll jail you!"

"The law says I can carry a gun anywheres in the state."

"Then I'll lock you up for disorderly conduct, for being a loony! I'm warning you, Lund, annoy anybody else in the Harbor and I'll throw your ass in jail so fast it will make your badge smoke!" He

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started for the porch, his big frame practically filling the doorway.

"Maybe the Hampton Point police will be interested."

Roberts spun around so quickly I thought he was going to swing on me. "Sure, go tell them about your cat—they'll toss you in a cell, a padded one! Maybe you don't believe this, but I'm doing you a favor—here's the favor, some free advice: don't make a fool of yourself in Hampton Point. They have a big force, a rough one. It's a rich town and they got plenty of cops because they're afraid the migratory potato pickers might get out of hand in the summer. You go there, they'll laugh you out of town!"

He ran down the porch steps, and into the radio car. I leaned against the wall, watched the lights of the car disappear—wondered what to do next. For a second I was full of doubts . . . But it *had* to be Pops. He was the 'old goat,' and for some reason he'd killed Barnes, then taken off. That accounted for the dummy up on the Widow's Walk. I'd seen the hands move this afternoon, but whose hands? On a hot day why would anybody, even a supposedly sick man, keep a hat over his face, a blanket on? Somehow Larry Anderson was in this, probably protecting Pops, maybe being blackmailed. Larry had seen me out on the bay this afternoon with the glasses, thought I was spying on Pops again, that I hadn't been taken in by the Nelson 'suicide.' So Larry told the 'old goat.' Or he and Pops could be in this together.

Hell, everybody in the Harbor might be in on this. Jane Endin hadn't been at the funeral, she only lived a few blocks from here, must know about mushrooms and herbs. She could be working with Pops, trying to scare me off. But off what? What possibly could be going on in this peaceful lousy hick burg that called for murder? I didn't know who did the other killings, but Matty had to be the work of Pops, whoever he was and wherever he was.

I went inside and dumped every bit of food I could find—the stuff in the ice-box along with sugar, salt, cereals—in the garbage can. Even the toothpaste. Some flys were on Matty. I rummaged around until I found an empty hat box and put Matty in it. I carefully wrapped the box in aluminum foil, tied it securely with fish line, then put the package in his wicker basket. I scrubbed the table-top, threw out the cleanser.

There was a clam rake in the back of the house. I took it down the road to an empty field, buried Matty. It took me a long time to dig the grave and it was very dark when I finished.

I dropped into the Johnsons where everybody stared at me as if see-

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ing the village idiot—maybe because I was still carrying the clam rake. Bessie asked if I wanted supper. I said no and took her aside, whispered about the toadstool and that I had thrown out all the food in the house.

"I can't understand how one possibly got in. I can easily recognize a toadstool when I..."

"Never mind that now; you didn't do a thing. Just keep quiet about it and spend the night here."

Everybody talked in hushed tones, as if not to excite me. I told Bessie I had buried Matty, not to worry if I didn't return that night. I asked for Jerry's address.

"What do you want his address... for?" she started to ask. But something in my face stopped her and she said in a loud whisper, "He lives on Belmont Lane. Not far away. Matt, be careful."

"Don't worry about me. And remember, don't leave this house."

I stopped at our cottage for my gun and a flash, feeling the silence of the house, before starting for Jerry's place. In the dark all I could see was a small house set in a large garden. I lit a match to read a crude TAXI sign nailed to a small fence. He wasn't home. The garage was empty too.

But it didn't matter much, I'd wanted to ask what he knew about Pops. And borrow his car—see if I could get any help and ammo from the Hampton Point police. But Roberts was probably right. If I walked in and told them I was gunning for a killer, that the Nelson thing was a set-up... all because my cat was dead... they'd laugh me into a straitjacket. These village cops, washing each other's hands. I had to play it alone.

I headed for the bay, walking across the Harbor. Through the open doors and windows I saw everybody in their houses, silently watching TV, and maybe nibbling at a bottle.

Cutting across Main Street, I walked toward the water down a narrow street I'd never been on before. To my surprise next to a boat and bait place I found a small store still open. It was a tiny shop, the downstairs of a house, and seemed to stock a little bit of everything.

I wanted a flash and also I was very hungry. A fat woman with wispy grey hair and wearing a bag of a dress waddled out of a back room, asking, "Yes sir, what can I do for you?"

I bought an expensive light, the only kind she had, glad she hadn't cracked about my being a sure sign of summer. I ate a candy bar as I went over to a basket of fresh vegetables, felt of the string

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beans and cabbages—like I knew what I was doing, asked if they were local produce.

"Only the potatoes and tomatoes. Be more truck vegetables in a week or two. Long Island potatoes ain't much this year."

Over a bottle of soda I listened to a speech about what the local potato growers did wrong, how expensive the California and North Carolina crops were. I had a hunk of over-sweet cake before she mentioned Anderson, said he went into Patchogue for vegetables three times a week. I said, "I've seen his truck around. New one. He must be making out pretty well."

"He's always cheerful. Joy to have that man around. And once you're straight with him, he's easy on credit. Frankly I don't know how Larry does it; he can't meet the supermarket's prices. I used to sell four or five baskets of fruits and vegetables a day during the summer. Now I'm lucky to sell that much a week. Had anything else to do, at my age, I'd give up the store. I order less and less from Larry, but I suppose he does better in the other towns."

"This Anderson lives with his father, doesn't he? Old man they call Pops?"

"That's not his daddy," the fat lady said, getting up steam. For ten minutes she told me what a wonderful man Larry was, how Pops wasn't 'even a relation', merely an old friend, but Larry couldn't have treated him any better 'if the old man had been his father'. It also seemed that Pops was a wonderful man, always full of jokes and willing to help out; sometimes he brought her fish every day.

End Harbor was simply full of 'wonderful' men and women—when they weren't killing or getting killed. The storekeeper went on to tell me how active Larry was in the city council, had organized a Scout troop—only there weren't enough kids interested. Pops was busy in the various cake sales and used to sell chances for the annual Legion car raffle—up till last year when his arthritis got real bad. I paid her and left in the middle of a speech about the younger generation.

I walked down to the beach, along the shore toward the spot where Andy and I had landed a couple days ago. I had company, a big Irish setter tagged along behind me. I threw some stones for him to chase and when I reached Larry's property I shooed the dog away. Climbing the bank I saw a light in the kitchen of Anderson's house. I walked carefully through the rough grass until I reached the garage. The doors were open, the truck standing inside, and the concrete floor was wet. Stepping inside I covered the flash with my hand and turned

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on the light. All I saw were stacks of empty wooden crates and bushel baskets. On the truck there were crates of lettuce and fruit, all recently watered down. I don't know what I expected to find but I didn't find a damn thing. There was an outboard in one corner, on a rack, a . . .

I heard a sound outside the garage and froze, my hand sneaking toward the gun inside my belt—until I remembered it was empty. Somebody was walking around the outside of the garage, walking softly. I heard them come to the door as I strained to see in the darkness. The padding sound came directly toward me, despite the fact I was hidden behind a pile of peach crates, and a moment later there was the small whine and the cold muzzle of my buddy, the dog, touched my hand. I was so relieved I nearly giggled as I whispered, "Beat it, boy."

It must have seemed a caressing sound to him for the big son-of-a-bitch put his paws on my chest and tried to lick my face. I pushed him away and he hit one of the stacks of empty crates—which came down with all the thunder in the world. I ran out of the garage, knocking over more boxes, headed for the beach. I heard a door slam and then heavy steps as a flashlight sliced the darkness. I kept running as fast as I could, bent low and zig-zagging, my breathing harsh. I hit a rut and went sliding on my face and chest in the heavy grass. The air was knocked out of me, the lousy gun in my waist felt like it had gone through my stomach. I lay there, sobbing for breath, wondering if I'd busted my store teeth. The heavy footsteps came closer and I clamped a hand over my open mouth to muffle my breathing.

The night was split with the roar of a shot gun blast followed by a tiny, unreal scream.

The footsteps approached slow, cautiously. Then some 15 feet to my right a flash snapped on and I saw Anderson, shot gun in work-gloved hands, bending over. He raised the bloody remains of the Irish setter by one leg, the head resting on the ground. Anderson remained bent over like that for a few minutes, an odd smile on his thick face. It could have been a smile of relief or of sorrow. I wondered what he was doing . . . he seemed to be listening to the night.

I was as flattened to the ground as I could get. I was scared outright silly—he hadn't known it was a dog he was shooting at. And I was impressed by the gloves touch—Anderson believed in being prepared—fingerprints must have been uppermost in his mind at all times.

Satisfied no one was coming, he dropped the dog and walked back

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to the garage, the light bouncing ahead of him. The fall had knocked my own flash from my hand and I didn't try to find it, but crawled toward the beach like a frightened snake, thankful I hadn't broken any real bones or false teeth. When I heard Larry returning I played dead in the grass again, grateful I could still *play* at it. He held the gun in his right hand, a shovel in his left. Dragging the dog farther away from me, he finally dug a deep grave and buried the mutt. It was a rough night in the Harbor for animals.

It took him almost an hour and all that time I was flat in the damp grass, fighting gnats and watching his powerful movements. He was sure a strong clown. One thing was for certain: my theory about Pops being out of the house, that dummy on the Widow's Walk, was right. If the old man was sick in the house with a bad ticker Anderson sure wouldn't be blasting a shot gun on the grounds. And if Pops had been hiding in the house, the gun blast would have brought him out. He was probably on the run for killing Barnes, and Nelson. But theory wasn't worth its salt unless I found the motive. Suppose Pops wasn't home—what did that *prove?* Pops and this Anderson were doing something shady and the only way I could get a lead on them would be to find out everything about Anderson and his too prosperous business.

When Anderson returned to his house I got up and walked stiffly along the beach.

Then I went over to Jerry's house. He was still out and I stood on his porch, wondered again where he could be. There was a light in the house across the way and I saw a shadow behind the curtain. That would be nosey Mrs. Bond.

I crossed the street and the shadow disappeared. I rang her bell and a moment later this little old lady opened the door. I said, "Mrs. Bond, I'm. . . ."

"I know," she squeaked, her beedy eyes bright and a faint whiff of port clinging to her words, "You're that secret service man."

"You know where Jerry went?"

"Oh my, what's he done now?"

"He hasn't done a damn thing, I . . ."

"See here, young man, don't raise your voice to me."

"I . . . eh . . . wanted to hire his car, taxi me to the station," I said, almost floored by that 'young man'.

"I haven't the slightest idea where he is. He drove away in the middle of the afternoon and hasn't been back since. You were here before, weren't you?"

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"Yeah. If he returns soon, tell him I'd like to see him."

"If you think I have nothing better to do than watch for that—that foreign devil to come home. . . ."

"You've been watching him for years, what's a few more hours?" I said, walking away.

I walked across the Harbor till I reached our cottage, suddenly kept walking. Jane Endin's car was in the driveway and two of her windows were lit. I worked the arrow-head knocker. When she opened the door she looked different—much younger. Some of the tenseness was gone from her face, her eyes rested. She was wearing a mannish sport shirt and jeans, full of paint stains. I said, "Hello," and she nodded, asked, "Mr. Lund, what has happened to you now, or do you always dress this sloppy?"

I looked down—hadn't realized my pants and shirt were streaked with grass stains. "Seems I had another accident."

"Be careful, you may be accident-prone. Come in. Like to wash up? Your face is dirty."

She took me to the bathroom and as we passed through the living room I saw her latest work standing on an easel. It seemed to be a picture of a rough sea but the water was a violent red, the wave-caps a terrible purple, and the sky a dead, sickly green. It wasn't a picture you forget quickly.

The bathroom fixtures were bulky and ancient. I washed, drying my face and hands on toilet paper. For a second I glanced at the big bath tub with envy, then went back to the living room.

I stared at the new painting and she asked, "Do you like it? Don't touch it, please, it's still wet."

"That's okay. I'm wearing gloves."

Her eyes seemed to harden, then she giggled—and for a moment she seemed about 18. "That's a wonderful joke."

"And very old. Yeah. I think I like it. It's the nightmare terror a rough sea can give you."

"Thank you, that's exactly what I had in mind. The other day, when I was staring at the sea all day . . . it seemed so terribly ruthless. Since I decided not to go to Edward's funeral today, I worked hard on the painting to pass time."

She lit a cigarette, started to hand me the pack, said, "But you smoke a pipe. I'm sorry about what happened to your cat."

"Who told you?" I patted my pockets: my pipe was some place in Anderson's field. It was a damn good piece of briar, too. I reached over and took one of her cigarettes.

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"I have Newsday delivered here every afternoon, and the boy told me. First time I ever heard of anybody making a mistake about toadstools. Lucky it was only the cat."

"Yeah, *only* a cat. And it was a mistake all right, a big one," I said slowly, wondering if I'd be booting things by taking her into my confidence. I had a hunch Jane was completely straight, still any horse player knows a hunch addict is a fool, but I couldn't waste any more time. And I couldn't go it alone. I took the plunge. "You see, now I'm sure I know the real killer."

"Killer? You think somebody killed your cat?"

"I *know* the louse who killed my cat also murdered Doc Barnes and this Nelson."

She jumped a little, went pale. "But I thought. . . ? That is, they are so sure; they said they found Edward's scarf on the dead man."

"Forget Nelson for now. I think I know who killed the Doc. But I don't know the motive, the reasons why, all the little things that will round out the full picture. I need your help for that."

"My help? I'll do anything to get Edward's killer, but . . . but I hardly see how I can be of any help. What can I do?"

"You . . ." I wiped tobacco crumbs from my lips. I never could smoke cigarettes, not even when I was sneaking a smoke on my post. "You can be a big help. I need background information about Pops. I want to know all about him. And about Larry Anderson."

"Not Larry. He's . . ."

"Skip telling me what a community pillar he is. I'll give it to you from the shoulder—I think he and Pops are in some kind of racket. I've checked, and he's making too much dough from his vegetable business. Wait—let me talk. Pops is supposed to be very sick—Anderson takes him up on the roof, that Widow's Walk, every day for the sun. I'm sure that's an act, with a dummy. I think Pops killed Barnes—but I don't know the motive, yet—and is in hiding. I was out on the bay this morning, with my field glasses. I believe Larry thought I was watching the house, that he told Pops, and my cat was killed to scare me off the case. Either Larry did it or. . . ."

"Mr. Lund, do you realize what you're saying? It's ridiculous. Strong as he is, Larry has never struck anybody, not even in anger. As for Pops, why he's a jolly, gentle old man. They're like father and son."

"Maybe. But Pops has to be the 'old goat' the Doc was going to see after he left Jerry. And if Pops didn't kill the Doc, he knows who did—that's why he's hiding. The point is, Larry isn't acting like he

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has a sick 'father' in the house, he's firing a shot gun like he's in a battle."

"Larry and Pops—they're the last two people in the world I'd think of as . . . killers."

"Will you help me, Miss Endin?"

"I simply can't believe they are crooks or . . . even bad."

I crushed the damn cigarette in a clam shell ash tray. "Okay, you answer a few questions and convince me I'm wrong. Who is Pops? What's his full name?"

"I don't know his first name but his surname is Brown. Long as I can recall he was just called Pops, Pops Brown."

"Know where he came from?" Maybe Pops knew Nelson in California and they both had something on Barnes.

"No. Seems to me he was always around the Harbor, always an old man. When Mrs. Anderson was alive she needed a farm hand, or she'd have to take Larry out of school. Pops was working around, clam digger, potato picker, fixed up the roads—he helped Mrs. Anderson out in return for room and board. He's lived there ever since. For the last couple of years, even though he was too old to work, Larry has taken care of him, treated him fine. Pops always has spending money."

"I bet. Did Pops ever leave here, say for a few days or weeks at a time?"

"No."

"Doesn't anybody know where he came from? Has he any relations?"

"Pops is about the oldest person in town, all his pals have passed on. Guess there isn't anyone who knows much about him. I know sometimes he would have a friend or two, also old men, visiting him for a month or so. Mr. Lund, you're terribly wrong about all this."

"I don't think so, there're too many phoney angles about Anderson. Did his mother leave him any money?"

"Oh no, they were always very poor."

"And from what you've told me Pops was a bum, so he didn't have any. Anderson's post office job isn't much, this is a 3rd rate post office, he gets around $1500 a year. Yet he pays his bills promptly and with cash, his business is the only one in the Harbor that's able to buck the supermarket—why only Larry's?"

"I don't know, but if he was so rich, why would he keep the mailman job? Also Larry doesn't deal only in the Harbor."

"Is Anderson the only wholesale produce man in these parts?"

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"In End Harbor, but I'm sure there are others around."

"So we have a lot of two-bit stores and competition for their trade, but for some reason Anderson is rolling in dough—the new truck, station wagon, top credit rating, well kept house. I think he has too much money, more than his business can account for. In both his jobs, mailman and trucker, he gets around. Could he and Pops be in some kind of racket, like the numbers, or making book?"

She smiled. "You don't know Larry."

"That's why I need your help, I want to know all about him. I don't seem to know anybody in the Harbor. Yesterday you told me he'd made some . . . passes at you. Yet now you're defending him."

"Not defending him but trying to have you understand how wrong you are about him. Larry was always a mama's boy. His father died when he was about 11 or 12 and Larry . . ."

"How did he die?"

"Heart attack while clamming in the winter." She seemed to be thinking about it.

"They found his frozen body in the boat. I was just a kid then, but I think Edward was starting his practice and Larry's father was his first real case. I remember he had him stretched out on the dock, trying everything to revive him. You see, up until before the war, when factories started springing up in Hampton, and even in the Harbor, this was a very poor town. Everybody was on short rations. They clammed, fished, rented rooms, picked potatoes—in addition to whatever regular job they might have. My Dad used to go out in his old leaky boat over the weekends at low tide and bring in a dozen bushels of clams. It's hard work and in those days brought in about ten dollars a weekend, more in the winter. Of course now they get as much as $5 and $6 a bushel, but the bay is pretty well cleaned out. It takes over 15 years for a clam to grow and . . ." She shook her head, as if scolding herself. "I'm talking all around what you want to know.

"Larry always worked hard for his mother; delivered papers, peddled berries in the summer, any odd job he could get. And of course he worked hard on their farm. He was even deferred from the army on account of he was her sole support, but he was drafted when she died in '43. It was just before he went into the army he began seeing me."

"What does 'seeing me' mean exactly?"

"Not what you think," she said quickly. "We saw each other for a few weeks. He would take me driving—at night, to a movie—in some

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other town . . . always careful we weren't seen together in the Harbor. One night he tried to paw me and that was the end of it. I never cared for him and I resented his thinking he could . . . you know . . . just because I'm an Indian."

"Why hasn't Anderson married since his mother died? Has he any girl friends?"

"None that I know of. I suppose he's married to his business, he works very hard at it."

She hesitated, then said: "If you really think Pops and Larry are mixed up in this, that Pops is gone, why not ask Chief Roberts to look into it?"

"I don't trust him. Frankly I don't trust anybody in the Harbor—except you. Everybody seems to be working hand in hand to cover up this mess."

"Why do you trust me, Mr. Lund?"

"I don't know why. I just do. When are you going back to work?"

"In a day or two. I'm still pretty jittery, even though I had a restful day, today."

"The main thing I'm lacking is the motive, the *why,* to all this. Anderson was around the house today, which means he should be out on his vegetable route tomorrow. I have this . . . hunch, I guess, that his traveling around the countryside is the key to everything. It's the only thing he does different from anybody else in the Harbor. Maybe he has a couple of wives or gal friends stashed away, maybe he's peddling dope—that would tie him in with the Doc. Most likely he has Pops hiding out someplace around here. I'd like to tail him tomorrow and I need a car. Can I borrow yours?"

"If he had anything to do with Edward's death, I'll not only let you have the car, I'll go along with you."

"I don't want to put you out," I said, full of suspicion again.

"I haven't anything else to do, and I know the countryside. But there's one condition: if you don't find anything to definitely prove that Pops is gone, what I mean is, if you're not absolutely sure, one way or the other, I want you to go to Chief Roberts, have him ask to see Pops."

"I'll buy that," I said, my suspicions melting—a little. "What time do we start?"

"Sometimes when I'm too nervous to sleep I take long rides during the early morning hours, before going to work. I often see Larry leave his house at 4 A.M. That's when we should start, too."

"Good," I said, getting up, thinking of the dizzy young thing in the

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Hampton watch factory. Driving seemed to be a psychiatrist's couch out here. "I'll call for you at three-thirty."

Jane got up slowly, seemed to stretch. "It will save time if I pick you up in front of your cottage."

"Okay. I live at . . ."

"I know where you live, Mr. Lund."

I said that would be fine and stopped to look at her painting again. Standing beside me, she asked, "Would you like to have it?"

"Well . . . I'd like to buy it," I said as if I bought paintings every day. "How much?"

"That's being silly. If you want it, I'll give it to you."

"I do want it. Thank you."

"It should be dry in a day or two. I'll have it framed and ready before you leave the Harbor. I'm glad you want one of my works."

Walking back to the cottage I was confused. For no reason except my instinct, which I didn't trust, I was taking Jane into my confidence. But I didn't like her going with me, began to doubt who was actually tailing who. It was odd she knew where I lived. Still, it was a small village, she would know . . . maybe.

It was after eleven and I stopped at the Johnsons to tell Bessie I'd spend the night in her cottage. Mr. Johnson was playing solitaire on the kitchen table, said, "Bessie and Andy went home about an hour ago. It's all right, their. . . ."

I sprinted for the cottage, came busting into the place, puffing like a whale and there was Danny grinning nervously at me. I fell into a chair as I tried to ask, "What are you doing here?"

"Take it slow, Matt. Man your age shouldn't be racing down a street. Anybody chasing you?" I noticed he had the kid's baseball bat leaning against a chair.

I shook my head. "Where's Bessie and Andy?"

"Sleeping. I happened to get some time off, thought I'd make it a long weekend, be with you."

"Cut the slop, Danny, Bessie phoned you to come."

He came over and sat on the arm of my chair. "Yes. She's worried about you, Matt. Dad, I've always looked up to you as a man with plenty of good old common sense—so just tell me one thing and I'll be quiet—are you sure you're not going off the deep end on Matty's death?"

"Matty's death got me angry but it didn't make me hysterical, if that's what you mean. Before I was kind of playing at solving this murder, now I think I know what I'm doing."

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He slapped me on the back lightly. "Okay, Dad. What can I do to help you?"

"Stay with Bessie and Andy every minute of tomorrow. Don't frighten them, go to the beach and all the other things you usually do, but don't let them out of your sight. Having that bat around isn't a bad idea either. I'm going to sleep on the porch because I have to be up in a few hours."

He wanted to ask where I was going, but didn't. He pointed at my clothes. "Been in a fight?"

"Nope, merely crawling on the grass. Now stop worrying. Tomorrow I'm only going riding, to see some of the other towns. With a woman. No danger."

"This Indian sex-boat Bessie told me about?"

"Sex-boat? I ought to fan Bessie's . . . !"

My face was turning red.

"Hungry? I have tea on and . . ."

"Where did you find food here?" I shouted.

"Easy, Dad. Bessie told me over the phone that you'd thrown out everything, so I brought some down with me."

I washed, had a cup of tea and a few sandwiches, made up the porch cot, set the alarm. I didn't need a clock to wake me—I never went to sleep. I listened to the country noises, and thought of nothing and everything. Mostly I lay there waiting—waiting for something to happen. I had this feeling I was in way over my head, had dragged Dan and his family in, too. I wanted bullets for my gun, I wanted Roberts at least working with me.

In the quiet I couldn't kid myself any longer—as a cop I didn't have much confidence in me. I was goddam frightened.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I GOT UP at three and turned off the alarm. I washed and shaved, careful not to make any noise. When I came out of the bathroom I found Bessie at the stove. She had an open robe over her baby-dolls, giving her a very *deshabille* affect. "Coffee, Matt?" she whispered.

"What are you doing up?"

"I've always been a light sleeper."

"What did you have to send for Dan for?"

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"You have me worried, Matt. Danny says you're going out with this Jane Endin today. Any danger?"

I laughed. "That's what you've wanted, me to take her out. We're merely going around and asking a few questions."

I went into my room and watching the sleeping boy, I hid my empty gun. The kid had a big knife in his fishing box, but I didn't know much about using a knife.

I was sipping a tiny cup of soupy Turkish coffee when a car pulled up outside. I went out and asked Jane if she wanted coffee. The dim light from the dashboard hit the planes of her face at an odd angle, making it look like a long soft mask. She was wearing slacks, a tight white blouse with a big jade pin at the neck, and a short suede jacket. She hesitated, then said she would take a cup. We walked to the house and I introduced her to Bessie—for a second they looked each other over like pugs listening to the ref's instructions. Jane drank her coffee in silence, and drank it fast. Then she stood up, told Bessie, "It's very good. Thank you." She turned to me. "It's getting late." She walked toward the door, the odd, stiff-legged walk, her thick braid doing a saucy dance on her back.

Bessie put her lips to my ear and whispered, "Wow!"

As we drove toward Riverside and Patchogue the sky was bright with pale stars and the road spotted with fog pockets. Jane was a good driver, real good. After a while she said, "Your daughter-in-law is a very attractive woman. It must be a joy to have children, visit with them."

"After kids grow up they should stay out of their parents' way, and vice versa. I don't think they want to be bothered with an old man. And I didn't want to come here. I have a better time alone in the city."

"The fortunate are not always aware of their fortune."

I didn't know if that was supposed to be an old Indian saying or not, and didn't ask. "Shouldn't we see if Anderson has pulled out with his truck?"

"He's left. We'll pick him up at Patchogue. He never makes any stops until he starts back. He'll return to the Harbor by 9, to deliver the mail. About 10:30 he'll pick up his truck, head out toward Montauk."

My mind began to wrinkle with doubts as I wondered how often Jane had tailed Anderson before—or driven with him?

"That was an odd coffee Mrs. Lund served. I hear she makes an interesting wine pudding."

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I turned and stared at her. "How did you know that?"

"Very simple. Mrs. Lund asked Charley, who has the store as you turn into Main Street, for grapes, said she was going to mash them. Naturally he asked why and she told him about the wine pudding. I happened to be in the store later in the afternoon when he was repeating the recipe to some other woman. Don't people talk to each other in New York?"

"There's so many people it's hard to tell."

The roads were empty and she kept the car at 50, only slowing down as we went through Riverside, and as we neared Patchogue an hour later, in a lot of truck traffic.

It was starting to turn light as she pulled up before some old buildings, nodded down the street. There were lights on in a warehouse beside a railroad siding, and several trucks were backed up to a loading platform. Anderson was watching two colored men loading his neat truck.

"What do we do now?"

"Wait," I said, reaching into a pocket for my lost pipe and a notebook. I borrowed one of her cigarettes as I wrote down the name of the wholesaler and the time. Jane sat there, staring at nothing; she made me uneasy.

At 6:48, the day starting bright and sunny, Anderson headed back toward the Harbor. I nudged her knee, told her not to stay too close. If I'd had my wits about me, I would have brought the glasses along. But there were more cars on the road and it wasn't any trick tailing the big green truck. Anderson drove some 20 miles before he stopped at a village of two stores; a hardware shop and a general store. The owner of the general store helped Larry unload a few crates of stuff.

I made a note of the store and time, told Jane to drive on. She asked, "I thought you were going to talk to the man in the store?"

"We'll return later. You know Anderson's route, don't you?"

"No. From here on he'll make a lot of stops. Suppose you get out and talk to this man, while I follow Larry? Takes him five or ten minutes at each stop, and when I find where he's stopping, I'll come back for you."

"We can return here later in the day. . . ."

"I'd like to get this over quickly. I don't like spying on people."

There wasn't anything for me to do but get out. I told her, "If you don't see me when you come back, honk your horn twice. And park a ways down from the store." She nodded and drove off. I knew I was making a rock play. Why had she practically put me out of the

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car? Was she warning Larry? But she could have done that last night.

The storekeeper was a pudgy Italian, or maybe a Syrian, with a very straight large nose and dark eyes. He was opening a crate of melons, feeling each one, as I walked in. I bought a corncob pipe and some tobacco. He gave me the, "Now I know summer is really here, seeing you. Stopping at the Fan Tail Hotel, sir?"

"No, I'm staying at End Harbor. Merely riding around this morning."

Giving the last melon a feel, he took the bait. "My vegetable man comes from there. You know Larry Anderson?"

"I've seen his truck. Hard worker."

"Kills himself three times a week, and of course he's the mailman, too. But in the winter he's only here once a week. Me, I stand on my feet all day, winter and summer."

"I bet," I said, trying to turn the conversation around to something —and not knowing what "something" was. "Guess you know Pops is sick? Larry must have his hands full."

"I know. Larry takes good care of old man Watson. Tell you, you won't find many people these days giving a hoot about anybody else or . . ."

"Did you say Pops' name was Watson?"

"Sure."

"Of course I'm only down for a week, but my son knows him and I thought his name was Pops Brown?"

He shook his fat head. "Naw, not the old man living with Larry. His name is John Watson, I know."

I considered flashing my badge to get more dope, but tried talk. "Hate to contradict you, mister, but I never forget a name. I'm sure it's Brown."

The storekeeper sighed. "Look, *I know*, every month I cash his Social Security check. John Watson—no middle name. For seven years I been cashing them. Mister, if I was on Social Security I'd *sit* the rest of my life."

A horn honked twice outside. "None of my business, but why does . . . eh . . . Watson come all the way over here to cash his check?"

He shrugged. "Maybe he don't want the End Harbor bank to know his business. Maybe it's a habit—I started cashing the checks when old man Watson was helping Larry on the truck. Now—every month Larry brings me the check. It's for . . . I don't even know why I'm telling you this, Larry always says he don't want people knowing his business. But, that's how I'm sure his name is Watson."

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The horn sounded again. "Guess you have me," I said, making for the door. "First time I've been wrong on a name in years."

"Always a first time for everything," the storekeeper said, opening another crate.

Jane's car was down the road. When she saw me she turned around and as I slid in beside her she said, "Larry's about 7 miles from here, making a delivery to a roadside diner, having breakfast there. Learn anything?"

"I don't know. What did you say Pops' name was?"

"Brown."

"Are you positive?"

"Certainly. Why?"

"Nothing, I couldn't remember it. We'll wait until Larry leaves the diner then do the same thing—you go on to the next stop, come back for me."

The diner was a fancy chrome job at a road intersection, and seemed too imposing for the orange juice I ordered. I said I noticed Anderson's truck leaving, were these his oranges? I had to order another juice before I could turn the talk around to Pops. But he only knew Pops as Pops.

Jane returned to tell me Anderson was at a store a dozen miles away. At this store and the next one, as I stocked up on tobacco, and cigarettes for Jane, I found out nothing. I was beginning to think the first storekeeper had been batty, when we stopped at a small store outside Riverside, several minutes after Larry pulled out. The store was run by a skinny Jewish woman who insisted Pops' name was Robert Berger. When I started my polite argument about having a memory for names, she cut me off with: "Mister, I don't like to contradict a customer, especially you, for now I know the summer has started well, but on this I'm sure. Berger himself wanted it."

"Wanted what?"

"When he was driving around with Larry, years ago, he personally asked me to cash his Social Security check. I remember, it was the first time I'd known the old man's name and I asked if he was Jewish —a name like Berger. He told me he was part Jewish on his mother's side. And every month Berger insists Larry bring his check here for me to cash," she said, proudly—I thought.

"Doesn't he trust the End Harbor banks?" I cornballed.

"Berger doesn't want his business mixed up with Larry's. That's smart, I say."

"I suppose so. Do you go into the Harbor to visit Berger often?"

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"Me? My husband has the chickens, I run the store, and any free time we have isn't for visiting—we rest."

"This Anderson certainly sounds like a good soul. Does he have many old men living with him?"

"Look, he isn't running a hotel. Just Pops Berger. If others looked after their old workers the way Larry does, this would be a better world."

I said it would; wanted to add it would be a world full of cemeteries.

Anderson made a fast stop in Riverside and Jane told me, "Now he'll go home, leave his truck, and take out the mail for an hour. Shall we follow his mail route?"

"No, that would be too obvious, a store is a public place, a home isn't. Let me talk to the guy in this Riverside store."

I bought some bacon and eggs and learned nothing—the storekeeper vaguely remembered Pops—but as Pops.

Back in the car I asked Jane, "How often do you go to these little villages we've stopped at?"

"Never. I don't know anybody there."

"Do the people in these villages, the storekeepers, do they come to End Harbor much?"

"Of course not. They might go into Riverside or Patchogue at times, to the bigger stores, once in awhile. Like on Christmas. What's the bacon and eggs for?"

"I had to buy something. Thought we might have breakfast at your place, then pick up Anderson when he starts on his route again."

"Worried about taking me into a restaurant?"

I heaved the package of eggs and bacon out the open window. She stopped the car, got out and pulled the drippy package of bacon out of the mess, wrapped it in the remains of the paper bag, slid back in the car. As we drove on she said, "Waste is stupid."

"So was that crack of yours. Stop at any diner or restaurant."

"I'd rather make us breakfast," she said. And I didn't make any remarks about understanding women—even to myself.

We put away a healthy snack of blueberry pancakes and coffee, although I'd eaten so much junk at the stores I had to force myself. When we finished she said, "You look tired, lie down while I do the dishes."

I said I was okay, helped dry the few dishes. She didn't talk for a time, then she asked, "You still believe Pops has run away?"

"I think Pops is dead."

She spun away from the sink, her hands falling to her side. "Dead?"

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"Maybe murdered."

"What did we see today that could possibly make you think that? I mean, Pops murdered, why it's . . ."

"I don't actually know how he died. Could be Barnes killed him. Or . . ."

"That's crazy!"

"I said I wasn't sure yet. Until I am, let's not argue about it. I don't want to blow holes into a half-formed idea."

"All right."

The surprising thing was, she didn't talk about it again. At ten o'clock we started shadowing Anderson once more. His route took him all the way out to Montauk. After a time I didn't bother to stop at all the stores Larry serviced—the pattern was easy to follow: Social Security checks under various names, 8 that I'd been able to find, were cashed each month but always at a store 20 or 30 miles away from the other. Although Hudon hadn't been among the names.

At a few minutes after three we were back in Jane's home, and Anderson's truck was in his garage. Jane insisted upon fixing lunch and I told her, "I'm sure of the motive now. Anderson and Pops had a Social Security racket going for them. Pops was getting checks under 8 different names, besides his own, and maybe more that we haven't found out. Anderson has the perfect set-up for cashing them, the storekeepers, miles apart, who know Pops under his various names. In fact Pops himself cashed the checks when he was working, then Larry took it from there when the old guy retired. As you said, there's little chance of the store owners meeting each other, checking on Pops' names."

"Where did Edward fit into this?"

"Here's what I think: Larry was away that Sunday night. The Doc got a call from Jerry and then Nelson dropped in to find out about his old buddy, who'd sent him a card from End Harbor. Now, as Barnes was about to leave he got another call—from the 'old goat'. That had to be Pops, who must have felt sick—I think the Doc found Pops dead and Larry then killed Barnes."

"But why? I can't believe he'd kill Edward."

"If I'm right, he not only killed him but did it up the street, so you'd be blamed."

"Me?"

"Of course, you should have been the number one suspect. But Larry didn't know about Jerry yelling at the Doc. Jerry was picked up instead and of course it didn't matter to Anderson."

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"But suppose Pops is—did—die? Why kill Edward?"

"Way I see it, Larry wanted to continue this Social Security racket and for that he had to have a *live old man.* Once the word went around Pops was dead, he couldn't cash any more checks. Let's say Pops had a heart attack and Barnes got there before Larry . . . Anderson had to think fast, if he killed Barnes and kept up the line that Pops was sick, *but still alive,* his racket could continue for another few months, or years. Even if he supposedly sent Pops to a sanatorium out of the Harbor, he could have Pops lingering for another year or so, keep on cashing the checks. My idea is Anderson had to think fast, so he killed Barnes."

Jane sat on a kitchen chair hard. "I still can't believe it. This $60 a month, or whatever you get on Social Security, is that worth killing for?"

"I think you can get from $30 to about $160 a month, depending on how high your salary was. Let's take an average, say each man was getting $90 a month, and keep to the 8 cases we know about—that's $720 a month, over eight grand a year. If they've been doing it for, well, ten years, that adds up to over $80,000. So it wasn't any penny-ante scheme. And you see how it explains Anderson's ready money—not enough dough to shout about, but to quietly repair the house, buy a new truck, pay bills quickly. He undoubtedly has a bundle hidden some place."

"I simply can't believe it. For one thing, how would Pops be eligible for all these checks under different names? He couldn't have held jobs under those names for any length of time. I mean, he's always worked in and around the Harbor."

"Jane, you still don't get it. Remember, if Larry did kill Barnes, then it had to be a hell of a cold-blooded killing, for Barnes was his good friend. Know what makes a cold-blooded killer? Only one thing: practice!"

"I still don't . . . What are you getting at?"

"Larry's place is on the edge of town, surrounded by high trees. You told me Pops sometimes had other old men out at the house. Did you, or anybody else, ever see any of them *leave?*"

"But I'd hardly know when they came or went. His house is out of the way and . . ." She suddenly froze, her mouth wide open with horror.

"I walked across Larry's grounds on Monday, came in unexpectedly from the bay, and he threw a gun at me and Andy. Know why? We were walking on his private cemetery!"

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"Eight murders?"

"At least. Ever read about the Bluebeard killings—the French guy who married a score of widows and killed them for their money? This is the same idea, but using men."

I felt so excited I started walking around the kitchen. Jane kept following me with her eyes, her long face sickly. Finally she said, "But to . . . to . . . kill so many . . .?"

"After they knocked off one man . . . you know the line: they could only get the chair once. I don't know how they lured the old men to the farm, but I can make a damn good guess," I said, talking aloud to myself, to get things straight in my own mind. "Here's Larry, a single man in a small town. He can't marry—a wife would get on to his racket. Suppose he drives into Jamaica, New York, Long Beach, hangs around bars to pick up babes. Okay, during the years he also has met a lot of lonely old men hanging around the bars. Be a snap to strike up a beer conversation, find eight who are not only getting Social Security, but are *alone* in the world. Maybe Pops goes along on these recruiting jobs, asks the other old guy to come out and keep him company, all for free. When did Larry's mother die?"

"In 1943," Jane whispered.

"They've had over a dozen years to take their time, pick at least eight victims. They lure an old-timer out and once he starts getting his checks, a matter of weeks, they knock him off. Who would know? No relatives, and the guy probably sticks to the grounds for the first few weeks. So a Social Security check for a . . . Robert Berger keeps coming promptly every month. Pops has already set up a store-keeper to cash it for him—and keep cashing them. Except for Pops dying this racket could have gone on for years."

"Somehow I still can't believe it. Doesn't the Social Security board ever check to see if a person is still living?"

"Frankly I don't know. I think a person has to file a yearly report if they continue working. I'll find out. But in this case the men weren't working, so the only way Washington would know they had died would be when the checks were returned, the envelopes marked 'DECEASED', and . . . Lord, Lord!"

"What is it?" Jane asked, sitting up.

"Merely thinking what a really perfect deal Larry has—he's the postman! I'm sure on the first of every month, or whenever the checks are due, little Larry is in the post office early, boxing up mail like mad—making sure nobody notices the checks, taking them out when he starts delivering the mail. Of course, that explains Nelson's death."

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"I'm bewildered. What does it explain?"

"Now listen: Nelson's story—according to Roberts—was that an old buddy of his had sent him a card from the Harbor. This guy named Hudon. I'll bet folding money this Hudon was one of the old men killed on Anderson's place, only he got the card off without their knowing it. Okay, Nelson happens to come East, decides to look up his friend. No Hudon. He went to Barnes because Hudon was sickly and Barnes is the only doc. Barnes can't help him, he never heard of Hudon. Nelson asks Roberts, who also isn't any help. But who would Roberts send Nelson to, who of all people in the Harbor would know if a man named Hudon had ever lived here? *Anderson the mailman!*" I pounded the table like a debater, delighted with myself.

"Nelson must have given Larry a bad turn, but by this time Anderson has already killed Doc, and somehow still has his scarf. Maybe Nelson doesn't take a fast 'no,' maybe he's asking around too much. Or, because I'm sticking my big nose into things, Larry feels Jerry won't even come up for trial and by now the 'accident' is no longer an accident. Larry's in a small sweat. Probably Nelson left a forwarding address in case Anderson should hear about Hudon. Nelson's in Hampton Point. Our boy Larry has to get out from under fast—he remembers the scarf, finds Nelson and kills him with his own gun, the suicide touch. How lucky our Larry seemed, Nelson packing a rod! And Roberts—he swallows the hook, again!"

Jane shook her head. "Edward only wore one scarf, one I gave . . ." Her voice died to a painful whisper, came alive as she said, "This is all a nightmare, a murder factory here in the Harbor."

"What better place than a sleepy village? Actually the only bad mistake Anderson made was killing my cat. Yeah, hadn't been for that, I would have forgot things."

Jane said slowly, "It's so hard to think of somebody you once knew as a killer. It's an insult to your memory. Well, what do we do now?"

"We could call in Roberts, or the Federal men," I said, not quite certain what I wanted to do. I suppose deep in my mind I had ideas of taking Larry solo—but I was too old for that. Truth is, I'd probably never been that young.

She said, "If Larry is such a monster, we have to put an end to this at once. I think we should get Art Roberts, demand to see Pops."

"But he'll kick like a mule on reopening his nice little neat case, arresting a pillar of the community."

"No, murder is a serious thing, even in the Harbor. Want to phone him from here or shall we go downtown?"

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That 'downtown' forced me to grin. I said we could phone. When I got Roberts, I told him, "Come out to Miss Endin's house at once—I have something for you."

"Again? What is it this time, a dead clam? I'm busy with . . ." The light sarcasm in his voice changed abruptly as he asked, "Jeez, not Jane Endin?"

I didn't want to talk much on the phone, maybe the operator was Anderson's cousin or something. "Look Roberts, I'm waiting exactly five minutes. If you're not out by then I'm making another call and there will be a flock of tourists in the Harbor, all of them with Federal badges!" I hung up and winked at Jane, thinking what a ham I was. She stared back with solemn eyes, as usual.

I suddenly wondered what her life would have been like if she'd had a sense of humor. Or would she have ended up the village whore?

Roberts and his musical comedy uniform were planted in Jane's living room chair less than five minutes after I phoned. I briefed him on what I'd found and he rubbed his big hands together as he said flatly, "I don't believe that Larry Anderson would. . . ."

"I know, he's the salt of the earth. Roberts, it's a bit late for the chamber of commerce spiel. I want you to demand to see Pops Brown. You won't see him because he's buried in Larry's yard—I think."

"But for . . . *all* those murders," he muttered, shaking his big head. "I can't bust into his house without a warrant, and if Pops is alive, I'll look. . . ."

I know what he was thinking and for a second I felt sorry for the handsome slob: Larry was the village big shot and if Roberts crossed him and the case turned out to be a dud, Roberts wouldn't have the pretty uniform for long. I said, "Don't stall me or I'll go over your head. Hell, Roberts, I'm giving you a break, letting you make the collar."

"Actually, all we *know* is he cashed some checks. Maybe people on his mail route gave them to him?" Roberts turned to Jane. "Did you hear these storekeepers say they cashed checks under different names?"

"No, I was in the car all the time, following Larry."

Roberts sprang to his feet—really *sprang*—and turned to me in triumph. "Then I've only your word for this whole. . . ."

The way the jerk towered over me made me angry. "You want to question the storekeepers? Go ahead, I'll give you the addresses. But I'm phoning Washington in a minute and I'll give you odds they have somebody at Anderson's house before dark!"

Roberts shrugged his beefy shoulders and sighed like a guy about

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to ask the boss for a raise. "Okay, okay. I'll see Pops. But, Lund, if he's alive, if this turns out to be a rhubarb, I'll work you over!"

"Cut the big talk, you're not a public hero yet. I'm going with you. Another thing, Anderson is shotgun happy, can you get a couple more of your men?" I nearly added, "If there are a couple more."

He sort of pulled himself erect and threw out his wide shoulders—all in one motion. "I can handle Larry."

He looked as if he could handle Floyd Patterson, but looks don't stop bullets. "How about giving me some ammo, and I'll pack my gun?"

"No need, there won't be any gun play." he said sharply. "I know Larry . . . I was trolling for blues with him only last week. And for all I know, you might be trigger-happy over that dumb cat of yours. You want to go, let's do it."

I didn't say another word, he was working up his courage and a push might have spooked him. We all walked out to the polished squad car and he told Jane, "This won't be any place for you."

"Yes it is. Edward Barnes was my friend."

She said it with such quiet dignity Roberts glanced at me to tell her something; I motioned for her to get in.

Larry's truck and station wagon were parked in the driveway but he wasn't in sight. We walked up onto the porch and Roberts rang the bell. Roberts was sweating a bit, but only over fear of losing his job—the jerk hadn't loosened his gun in its holster. After a moment Anderson opened the door. His shirt was off, showing thick muscles under a thin T-shirt, and a towel in his hand. He said, "Hello, Jane, Artie, Lund. I'm just washing up. What's this, a delegation? Something up for the Harbor Council?"

"Larry," Roberts said, "I want to see Pops."

Anderson was good, nothing changed on his face—but I saw the great muscles of his arms stiffen. "You know Pops can't see anybody or be disturbed. Doctor's orders."

"What doctor?" I asked.

"The specialist in New York. What's this about?"

"I won't do a thing to harm Pops," Roberts said. "Let me see him, I won't awaken him."

"Pops couldn't have done anything, he's been in bed since . . . Legally you have no right to bust into my house."

"Larry, don't put this on a legal basis," Roberts said softly. "I'm asking to see Pops, as a friend. You want me to ask as a police officer —I'll have to place you under arrest if you don't let me see Pops."

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"Arrest? Artie, are you crazy?"

"Let me see Pops and I'll explain all this."

I smiled—Anderson hadn't bothered to even ask what the arrest would be for—he damn well knew! But he suddenly stepped back from the door, told us, "Come in, but don't make any noise."

Roberts went pale, hesitated. I walked past Anderson, followed by Jane . . . and then Roberts. We were in an old type large living room, everything neat and spotless, and impersonal. Larry started up the carpeted steps to the floor above. As we followed he turned, asked, "Is it necessary for all of you to come up? Any shock can mean Pops' life."

"We'll be very quiet, won't make as much noise as a shot gun killing an Irish setter. Only Roberts will take a look into Pops' room. All he wants to see is his face." I stressed the word 'face'. Roberts was so jittery he might be satisfied seeing a couple of pillows under a blanket.

"Then keep your voices down," he said, turning to walk up the steps again. "I'll let you see Pops and then I'll want a goddamn good—excuse me, Jane—a good explanation for this foolishness!"

I saw the back of Roberts' neck become a sickly pink.

The upstairs hall was wide, potted plants on small tables lining the flower-papered walls. There was another staircase, smaller and steeper, at the end of the hall, that probably went up to the Widow's Walk. We walked past several open bedrooms, stopped in front of a closed door. Anderson whispered, "Artie, the more I think of it, I can't risk Pops' life by letting you see him. I don't know what this city snoop has filled you with but. . . ."

"Open the door a crack," Roberts said; almost pleaded.

"Suppose he's awake? The shock might. . . ."

"Cut the production number, Anderson," I said, trying to keep my voice both a whisper and tough. "Suppose he is awake? Roberts isn't a stranger, he's a friend of Pops."

Anderson shrugged, turned toward the door. He dropped the towel as he spun back around and clipped Roberts on the chin with a wild right. As Roberts folded and I leaped at Larry, I thought with a sort of stupid satisfaction I'd always known Roberts looked too good, had some glass in his square jaw. I was diving for Anderson's waist. I stopped thinking as he straight-armed me.

I knew I was sailing through the air and then I hit a wall as if going through it, slid down to the floor, shaken and dizzy. Vaguely I knew Anderson was heading for the stairs going down to the living

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room . . . and that I was crawling toward Roberts to get his gun. My eyes wouldn't focus and I wasn't sure if I was alive or dead.

I heard Larry yell, "Stay away Jane, I don't want to hurt you!" and the picture turned real and clear. Jane was backed against a wall, letting him run past. Then she calmly picked up a potted plant and threw it.

She was smart, didn't aim for his head but for his legs. The pot seemed to bounce once behind him, then break into a hundred pieces as it hit the back of his knees, sending him crashing down the stairs.

I yanked Roberts' Police Special from his shiny holster and staggered toward the steps. I expected to see Anderson out cold, but the rugged joker was standing on the landing below, blood on one side of his face. As he started down the stairs, I grabbed the railing to keep from falling, fired a shot into the ceiling. The staircase seemed full of thunder and over it—to my surprise—I heard a firm voice saying, "Don't move, Anderson, or I'll plug you! You've had it." I wished I felt half as strong as my voice.

He stood stock still for a split second, then turned and faced me, an open-mouthed, stunned look on his wide face. With the blood, the dumb look, his big muscles under the torn shirt, he looked like a brute, a human ape. I said, "Put your hands behind your head, keep 'em up there!"

My voice was like a whip and as he put his hands up, his bigness seemed to shrink. The great muscles began to tremble and his big face took on a puzzled expression for a second—until it went to pieces.

CHAPTER EIGHT

As THE TRAIN pulled out of Hampton we waved at Jerry, Bessie, and Andy. Jerry had insisted upon driving us to the station, for free, despite Sunday being his busiest night; and had only gone off the road a few times as Bessie yelled at him in Greek that he was a road menace.

I gave them a final wave and tried to make myself comfortable in the seat. I was loaded down with Bessie's gifts for Signe's brood, Jane's framed picture carefully wrapped in an old table cloth—which was just as well, it would have caused a sensation in the crowded train otherwise.

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I was also carrying a new batch of mosquito bites, an aching back, a lot of peeling sunburnt skin—and I was togged out in $141 worth of fancy clothes which Bessie had horsed me into buying. I was wearing a natty coconut straw, tropical blue suit, nylon sport shirt, Italian loafers, and a thin bow tie almost as red and loud as Roberts'. Bessie insisted I had to look "the part" when the reporters interviewed me. God knows I'd been cornered by enough newsmen and photographers. One magazine writer even rented a speedboat to talk to me while I was fishing with Andy. The last couple of days had been a marathon —even the hot-rod set had bought me a round of beers in a Harbor gin mill. I should have felt exhausted but I felt just fine.

Dan nudged me, whispered, "Your public," and nodded toward the front of the car. A couple of suntanned jokers in their correct summer 'grey flannel' outfits were in a huddle, pointing toward me. For once I was glad I'd bought the new duds, looked like I belonged on the train—although my inner man scornfully told me that was a snobbish damn fool sentiment. One of the characters left the huddle and walked down the aisle toward me. He said, "Excuse me, sir, but aren't you Mr. Lund, *the* famous detective in the End Harbor murder cases?"

"You mean the cop in the case," I said. "Yeah, my name is Lund."

He gave me a practiced junior executive smile, a firm handshake, said his name was Benson, or something like that. "Told my friends I recognized you from the news pictures. Wonderful work, Mr. Lund. I hope you don't mind this intrusion, sir, but there's one aspect of the case that puzzles me—how did Anderson ever think up such an ingenious scheme?"

Of course he had to talk in a crisp board-of-directors voice and more people turned around. I had quite an audience as I said, "He didn't think it up, merely fell into it. As stated in his confession, an old friend of Pops came to live with them in the winter of '47. About a month later the man died in his sleep. The following morning his Social Security check arrived. Anderson claims Pops said they should take a chance and cash it as he was certain the dead man had no relatives to ask questions. They shoved the body under the ice at the edge of the bay—to make it look like a drowning—and kept cashing his checks all during the winter. In the spring they quietly buried him on the farm. According to Anderson it was Pops who got the idea of killing more men, doing it wholesale."

"I see," this character said, as if it mattered whether he saw things or not. "One more point, for my wife, you know women and their sense of the morbid. How did they kill the others—shoot them?"

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"Your wife should read the papers, if she's that curious. No, they killed them 'painlessly'," I said, wishing he would leave me alone: I'd gone over the story so damn many times. "After the victim had put in a change of address with the Social Security board, and Anderson was certain it was in the mail, they got the man roaring drunk. Soon as he passed out, they poured a shot of carbon tetrachloride down his throat. Carbon tet is a cleaning fluid and easy to buy. This was Larry's brain storm. Carbon tet and alcohol causes uremia, so in case anything went 'wrong,' they could claim the man died of natural causes. There, now, you can go into business for yourself."

My new-found buddy flung back his head and laughed. "Not me, I know you can't get away with murder." He gave me a flash of his strong teeth, grinning in appreciation of his own cleverness. "Ironic, though—Anderson had no possible way of foreseeing his partner, this Pops, would call in Doctor Barnes and the doctor would find him dead. I suppose if he hadn't murdered the doctor he never would have been caught. Greed is the basis of most crimes, isn't it, Mr. Lund?"

"That's what I hear," I said and we shook hands again and he left to rejoin his pals. Danny said, "My, my, makes me proud to be the son of a famous superman."

"Yeah—I'm a goddamn hero in my old age. Boys at the precinct house will rib me for months," I said.

I shifted Jane's painting on my lap: It was too big to risk putting up on the luggage rack. And my lap had gotten big too, with Bessie's cooking. Dan said, "Here, rest the picture on my knees."

"It's okay. Certainly brighten up the old flat."

"Going to see her again?"

"Stop it. I took enough of that from Bessie."

Danny shrugged. "You'll still have two weeks vacation after Signe's kids work you over. Be nice if you showed Jane New York. Dad, you might as well be prepared to do it—all this coming week my dear Bessie will be working on Miss Endin. If I know my good wife, you might even find Jane waiting on your doorstep when you return from the mountains."

"If Bessie tries to . . .!" I stopped, my voice full of alarm—at myself. What scared me was I had to admit the idea gave me a kind of happy glow . . . the kind a guy my age isn't supposed to have—they say.

THE END

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Sergeant Bullock refused to believe police reports that Private Collins had committed suicide. He angrily challenged Honolulu's coroner to produce the boy's murderer. Which that suave gentleman did . . . in a surprising fashion . . .

IF THE SHOE FITS

by Marvin Rossman

First Sergeant Bill Bullock exploded when he saw the headline in the *Advertiser:*

"BODY OF AWOL SOLDIER FOUND IN RESERVOIR: PRONOUNCED SUICIDE BY CORONER."

How can they tell? How can they tell, he asked himself. A nice young kid like Private Ben Collins disappears. He left camp with a thousand dollars in his possession. Two weeks later his body is found in an irrigation reservoir. The coroner's office is quick to announce the case a suicide. How can they tell?

Sergeant Bullock obtained permission from his captain to make a trip to Honolulu—he wanted to do a little investigating on his own. He gave his dress shoes that last unnecessary swipe to heighten the luster; he adjusted the tie that needed no straightening; he brushed his crew-cut hair which jumped back on end as stiff as the bristles that stroked it. The last item was a stroke at his precise military mustache.

He got into the company jeep and headed for Honolulu. Bill loved this ride. The tall sugar cane made him think of corn growing at home. The pineapple fields formed soothing geometric patterns.

He passed the place in the road which came near the irrigation reservoir where young Ben Collins' body had been found by a plantation workman. From here it was a scant thirty-minute ride, partly through the peaceful greenery and palms of the sub-tropics, before the color of the city splashed into view.

King Street could be the main street of any western city of a quarter of a million people, except for the large proportion of Oriental and Hawaiian faces. Most pedestrians dressed like Mainland Americans, but there was a sufficient number of bright-

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printed aloha shirts and muumuus to give the scene a definitely Hawaiian flavor.

The Honolulu Hale, or City Hall, was a peach-colored stucco building at the edge of the business district, and the coroner's office was on the street floor. Sergeant Bullock asked the Japanese girl at the counter if he could speak to Mr. Paku, who was reported in the paper as having investigated the death of Private Collins.

She said, "You mean 'Koko'?" And when he shrugged, uncomprehendingly, she added, "We all call him Koko Paku. Sure, I call him."

Bill wondered, as he often had, at the informality of Hawaii, where it was perfectly usual for a secretary to refer to her boss by his nickname. Bill himself preferred more dignified and orderly procedures.

Koko Paku turned out to be a handsome Hawaiian about Sergeant Bill Bullock's own age—thirty-three—and of medium, neat build. His skin, of course, was darker than Bill's tanned coloring, but not quite copper. His face was wide-mouthed, mobile. It changed expression frequently, showing teeth that were dazzling white, though uneven. This was in sharp contrast to Bill's own severe poker expression. The most Hawaiian feature of Koko Paku was his eyes. These were large, brown and searchingly innocent, like a child's watching an adult devour candy. Paku spoke with the soft inflection of the islands.

"Can I help you, Sergeant?" He motioned Bill to be seated before his desk.

Bill gave his name and said, "This boy, Private Ben Collins, was in my company. I am not completely satisfied about the suicide report."

The deputy coroner's eyebrows shot up. "Why are you not satisfied?"

"Well, for one thing, Private Collins didn't strike me as the suicide type. Young, raw kid of nineteen. Not an especially good soldier but not bad either. Little bit of a lone wolf. No real friends in the company. But, man, I seen a hundred like him in the Army and not a one committed suicide."

"Which proves?" asked Paku, his eyebrows sinking to normal.

"I'm not trying to prove anything," Bill told him. "I just want to be sure that a sufficient investigation was made."

"You have some other reason why you think this may be more than suicide?"

Bill patiently explained his case. "Private Collins came from a rich family. His mother sent him a thousand dollars cash the day he left camp on pass. Two weeks later his body is found with only twenty-three cents in the pockets. It don't seem right."

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"How do you know this about a thousand dollars?"

"Everybody in Company D knew it. When a soldier gets a big amount like that by telegraph, the clerk in the Signal Corps who goes into town for the money just can't keep from blabbing it out."

"Sergeant, you think maybe a soldier killed Private Collins for the thousand dollars? A thousand dollars is not such a tremendous amount of money."

Bill's expression did not change, but he felt the blood suffuse his face. He wondered if Koko Paku was sneering at the military in general.

He said, "Soldiers have been robbed—and killed—for as little as ten cents. Don't the coroner's office think it suspicious that the money was gone?"

Koko Paku shrugged. A quick grin crossed his face as though the sergeant had made a joke.

"The money. That's not the affair of the coroner's office. Maybe he left it in his locker and his locker was rifled before we started to make the investigation."

"No," Bill told him emphatically. "I tried to get him to put most of it in the company safe but he insisted on taking it to town."

"Could he have gambled it away?"

"Not this kid. The public library and the Art Academy was his speed. Gambling, no."

"He drank, maybe?"

"Collins?" Bill felt his annoyance with the coroner's man growing. "He was so young looking, nobody would sell him a drink. Besides, Mr. Paku, if you knew the boy, you'd know how funny it is to think he might get drunk enough to lose the money."

Koko Paku grinned briefly, as if embarrassed.

"Sergeant, in a case like this there are no witnesses. We have to reconstruct."

"That's what I want to know. How did you reconstruct a suicide?"

"Here is the situation. When I am called to the scene the body has been pulled from the water. After two weeks in the reservoir, it is almost impossible to find signs of violence, but I look anyway. I find a wound on the skull."

Bill interrupted him. "And you still didn't think you should investigate for foul play?"

"Wait," said Koko Paku with a smile that Bill felt was intended to charm him and calm him. "There is more. Could be it is foul play. Could also be he bumped himself when he jumped into the water, not knowing the contours of the bottom of the reservoir, especially at night, if it happen at night, no?"

It was Sergeant Bullock's turn to shrug. He did, with a suspicion of contempt.

Koko Paku continued, "The

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reservoir is fifty yards from the road. You think if a robber did it, he would not leave the body near the road? He would carry the man fifty yards to the reservoir?"

"Not likely, but it could be if the murderer was a cautious man. Did you look for tracks, Mr. Paku?"

The coroner's man flashed him a patronizing smile. "After two weeks, find a track in a field of sugar cane? Especially when we have had so much rain? Just the same, I look. I did not find any. But I tell you what I do find."

Sergeant Bill Bullock waited. It seemed to him the pause was for dramatic effect, so the coroner's deputy could make his next point stronger.

Koko Paku said, "The body was dressed only in shorts. You think a robber or robbers would go to that trouble? They wouldn't just dump him in with his clothes?"

Bill said, "Maybe they wanted to make it look like suicide."

"True. That is true," said Koko Paku. "But you got to consider. The clothes are neatly laid out. The G.I. pants folded just so. The G.I. hat folded neat in one pocket. The shirt lay on top of the pants, neat like to put in a box. The tie is folded smooth on top of the shirt. The shoes are laid neatly to one side with the G.I. socks neatly rolled inside. Does this sound to you like the work of a murderer?"

"That's evidence," Bill admitted. "But nothing said so far *rules out* murder."

"Oh, I did not stop there. I examine the clothes for blood stains. I did not find any. I look for tears or marks of strain on the clothes. I did not find any. The clothes are dirty but there had been so much rain in that muddy spot it could not prove there was a struggle. So you see I had no choice but to declare it a suicide, no?"

Sergeant Bullock said sarcastically, "What you really mean, Mr. Paku, is that since you can't prove murder, you rule suicide in order to get the case off your hands."

Koko Paku didn't get angry. He sounded apologetic as he explained earnestly, "I also found his wallet, Sergeant. It had only twenty-three cents, but it was in the pants pocket. From my experience with robbers, they usually take the wallet, examine it later and throw it away at a distance from the crime. Does that convince you, Sergeant?"

"Not entirely," Bill told him. "I am only convinced that if it was a murder, it was not the usual type of murderer."

Koko Paku looked hurt. He said, "That is what I thought, too. But then I look at the shoes."

"The shoes?"

"Yes. You see, if there had been a struggle, or if Private Collins was hit on the head on the road

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and then dragged fifty yards through the cane fields, his shoes would be badly scuffed for sure."

Despite himself, Sergeant Bullock felt his admiration for Koko Paku rising. He asked, "What did the shoes show?"

"They are caked with mud. The heavy mud you would get tramping fifty yards through a wet canefield. Even after two weeks the hardened mud was still on the shoes. But no scuff marks. No scuff marks!"

He grinned at the sergeant, evidently happy at the way he had led up to this final stroke, at having cleverly saved his most important piece of evidence to the last.

Sergeant Bullock nodded. "I'm satisfied, Mr. Paku. It's just that I wanted to be sure the investigation was thorough." He rose to go. "Now I'm satisfied it was."

"You are?" asked Koko Paku. His eyebrows shot up in surprise at the other's acquiescence.

"Yes."

"I wish I was that easy satisfied," said the deputy coroner.

Sergeant Bullock's stiff features could not conceal his bafflement.

"What does that mean?" he demanded.

"There is one other possibility, Sergeant. It is robbery and murder. Private Collins gets off the bus near a short-cut route through the canefield to reach his barracks. It is night. The robber is hidden by the side of the road. Maybe he waits especially for Collins. Maybe he would rob any soldier that comes by. In any case, it is Collins. The robber slugs Collins. Collins goes down and out. The robber drags Collins into sugar cane to search him. Meantime he discovers the boy is dead. Who knows what goes on in the head of the murderer? But anyway, the plan comes to him to fake a suicide. He drags the body to the reservoir. He undresses it. He arranges the clothes neat. This is a careful man."

"But the shoes? What about the scuffed shoes?" Sergeant Bullock inquired.

"Ah, the shoes! That bothered me. But so careful a man. He would think of the shoes, no? He changes shoes with the dead man and walks away with scuffed shoes!"

Koko Paku gave the sergeant a grin of triumph that lit up his face. His teeth glistened in his dark face and even his eyes appeared to glitter. It was the infectious smile of a child proud of an A on his report card.

"You really think that happened?" Bill asked sharply.

"What if it did?" Koko Paku became suddenly dejected. "How could we find such a careful man? You see now, why I had to say suicide?"

"That's a problem, all right," Sergeant Bullock said sympatheti-

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cally. "Did you think of hunting for a man wearing Private Collins' G. I. shoes? His army number would be inside."

"I thought. But it's no good. Private Collins' army shoes were all at the barracks. So he was wearing store-bought dress shoes. And the shoes left at the reservoir are also store-bought dress shoes. I even think of looking for a man with scuffed shoes, but you see how silly that is. Over a quarter of a million people on this island! And anyway, after two weeks the shoes would be repolished bright or else thrown away altogether. Believe me, a coroner's job is not easy." He sighed heavily.

Sergeant Bullock found himself consoling the man.

"Take it easy. All this is speculation. I understand the suicide verdict. Now, if you *knew* that someone had changed shoes with Private Collins, that would be different. But in this case—" He left the sentence unfinished.

"Oh, but we do know, Sergeant Bullock, we *do* know."

"What?" Sergeant Bill Bullock exploded, just as he had upon first reading the news story. "How can you tell? How can you tell?"

"The shoes we found did not belong to Private Collins. They were a half size too big."

"That don't prove anything," Bill said flatly. "I sometimes buy shoes a half size bigger or smaller if I like them enough."

"But they were the wrong brand," Koko Paku said sadly. "We found a letter from his mother in Private Collins' locker. His mother sent these special Scotch-made shoes. The shoes we found are American."

Sergeant Bill sounded more exasperated than ever.

"What are you giving me, Paku? It's suicide. It's murder. It's suicide. It's murder. Once and for all, if you think it was murder, why did you report suicide?"

"Psychology. With a careful murderer like this we have to use psychology. It is our one chance in a thousand to catch him." Koko Paku looked very pleased with himself as he said this.

Sergeant Bullock's voice roared at the pitch he used on the drill field.

"Too deep for me, Paku! Too deep for me! Explain yourself."

The coroner's man soothed him with a gesture.

"I figure it like this. Hunt him down? That is impossible. But a man like this murderer, he is a perfectionist. He wants everything to be just so. He expects the investigation to be long-drawn-out before we are forced to announce suicide. So when we announce suicide real quick, he gets worried. Not too much, but a little. He still confident he is smarter than us. But he wants to be absolutely sure the investigation is really over.

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"So I figure if we announce it fast, maybe, *only maybe,* there is a small chance he will come in to check up for himself if he really is in the clear.

"And a bold man like this—a man with imagination—he might even come in wearing Collins' shoes as a sort of—whatchama-call—cocky gesture.

"See what I mean, Sergeant? By the way, what brand shoes you wearing now, and do they feel a little bit too tight, maybe, Sergeant?"

Bill's eyes narrowed, his knuckles whitened. He hit Koko Paku in the mouth, bowling him over.

"I'll have no part in this farce," he said, stalking out.

But he didn't get far. Koko Paku went to the telephone and called police to stop the sergeant in tight Edinburgh shoes who was leaving Honolulu Hale.

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The letter was unsigned — like all the rest. "The scent is in the air," it read. "I must move quickly . . ." And that night I took up my lonely vigil, watching the three of them through the window, knowing what was coming . . .

PEN PAL

by Willard Marsh

I CAME BACK TO MYSELF, as always, with the sensation of being shaken awake.

The fully drawn shades blocked all light, but I know the entire quality of the morning outside. A matter of training, available to anyone who will trouble to develop his perceptions. I dressed in the dark, and when the hall was quiet I went down to check the mail.

There was the usual clutter of advertising circulars on the foyer table, and a picture postcard for one of the other roomers, which yielded nothing. Then I uncovered a letter addressed to myself. It was in an unfamiliar hand, a sort of distorted scrawl, on the stationery of the Embassy Hotel.

There was no return address.

Coming back I passed the brunette on the stairs. She was in a freshly laundered housedress, one of those square-cut sacks in which most women look anonymous. But on her slight, tender body, it only made her immature grace more insistent. She lowered her eyes as I let her by. And at the foot of the stairs she paused, quite aware that I had lingered at the landing. A perfect moment of connection. She could have turned, we could have spoken. But apparently she remembered she was married and hurried on.

Back in my room, where my privacy was complete, I lit the lamp, put the coffee on and opened the letter.

There was no heading.

Still too early for the deadfall to be activated, so am content with stalking. No evasive action yet, no sign the quarry is aware. I have my outward daily routine, which consumes much of the time. The thousand little rituals that must be performed convincingly. It keeps me flexible for all emergencies.

My observation point is a

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neighborhood that has seen better days, like most of its inhabitants. They quarrel and make love through the tissue-thin walls with equal facility, and otherwise lead their undramatic lives as if no violence could ever happen on their doorsill.

There was no signature.

It was an obvious maneuver to unnerve me, to flush me from cover.

I took my position behind the shade, across from the air shaft. The window directly opposite was drawn and noncommittal. While waiting, I kept track of the lower housekeeping unit. All its window could give me, at this angle, was the lower part of a kitchenette. After a while the brunette returned from her marketing and I could glimpse her at her chores, from the lower half down — her thin legs, sweet as a colt's, moving among the gross legs of the table like a badly skewed film.

My own quarters were less complete, as befitting a bachelor by circumstance. I had the one cramped room with an indentation in the wall, which was the closet; a two-burner gas plate, a table of sorts and a bed; plus a sink where, in the continual darkness, an occasional cockroach scuttled. I never destroyed these pests, for I felt that any attempt to improve my environment would be an admission that I was reconciled to it—a sort of act of homesteading. I was here by urgency, not choice. This was the third move I'd been driven to in as many months.

Presently, more or less on schedule, the shade was raised on the opposite window. At a little past noon, the night watchman was up for the day. This theoretically gave him only five-odd hours sleep, but old men are not supposed to need much sleep. I studied his morning habits, searching for any variation. He had all the trappings of a harmless old man, even down to the false teeth which he fished from a glass on the windowsill and brushed before replacing them. It was unpleasantly comparable to removing a finger to manicure it.

Off and on throughout the day I monitored his activities, as an elementary matter of precaution. They were singularly unrewarding. He remained tediously in character, this watchman.

I was sitting on the front stoop when he left for work. I thought it might throw him off guard. But he only smiled the way old men do. Or the way he thought they were supposed to.

That night I followed the domestic bliss in the lower kitchenette, as well as I was able. The brunette is completely mismatched with the husband, one of those uncomplicated extroverts

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who takes his luck for granted. She deserves someone capable of quiet devotion; someone who has led a long lonely life of the mind, waiting for the smallest sign of understanding.

When I woke next, it was from the deep and dreamless sleep that is like a daily death for me. It was far enough past noon for the watchman to be up. Seated in the rubble of his breakfast dishes, he appeared to be copying items from the morning paper. Stock quotations, perhaps: placing imaginary sums with brokers, piling up imaginary wealth in a dream of identification with the owners of the plant he guarded.

Or perhaps communications to a confederate.

I slipped downstairs to find another envelope waiting for me. As before, it bore the imprint of the Embassy Hotel.

> I am in the gravest peril, I am in urgent danger of discovery. So far I have not provoked any counter measures, but the scent is in the air and now I must move quickly.

What was coming was evident. It was only necessary to decide from what direction.

I rested throughout the day, to conserve my strength for the evening vigil. However the couple across the way left shortly after dinner, and it was late when they returned. Long after the reflection of their lamp was gone, after their whisperings and their secret nuzzlings had certainly ceased, I waited at the air shaft. I have no memory of when sleep came, but then I never have. For it is then that my dark twin comes into being. I have no knowledge of his parallel life, his separate nighttime continuity, just as he has none of mine. If he walks in my sleep, it is like the dreams that I enact in his.

It was morning again. The old man was coming in off shift. A little later, the breadwinner of the lower love nest left for his own job. Isn't it a coincidence how the Watchman is always on hand to relieve the Husband?

VENGEANCE IS MINE

The hasty block printing contrasted starkly with the Embassy Hotel's gothic letterhead. I examined it for the last time, then laid it aside. Just as I laid aside all uncertainty of my position. I no longer had any choice.

Biding my time till the Watchman left for work, I followed at a not particularly cautious distance. There was no danger in the daylight streets — they were neutral terrain. He propelled himself along in the manner of old men, as if walking uphill. His head swung from side to side like a

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rusty pivot, taking in the street-life with a senile smile. At the bus stop, in the crowd, I got up close behind him. Hands are a dead give-away of age, there's no real way to disguise them.

And he hadn't. His were actually an old man's hands . . . he was what he represented himself to be.

He wasn't the one, then. Which made it deadly clear who *was*.

I walked back through the streets where dusk would soon be settling, hazing all the lamp-lit windows and the doors that shut me out. Arriving like a rabbit at his warren, I claimed the dark last refuge of my room. But even the rabbit has one last gesture of defense. He can use his muscular rear legs to kick.

I tried for one final glimpse of the brunette, but the lower window remained empty. Anyway it was late, it was time. I went back uptown to the bar around the corner from the Embassy Hotel, a hotel which seemed mistily familiar to me, as though I had been in it several times. I, or could it have been my dark twin? When I had killed sufficient time there, I went out to the alley.

It was Friday night. He would be along any moment, to cash his paycheck and have a beer or two before heading home to the brunette, to all the comfort and communication that I'd never found. Home, perhaps, to write me another letter?

There was a moment of panic when I realized that I didn't even have a weapon. The very concept of one was foreign to my nature. Even at the Institution, where the letters first began, turning up without stamps or postmark in the envelopes provided by the state—the sly hounding letters that the attendants ignored, that the attendants said, ridiculously enough, were only notes I had written myself—my only thought had been of flight.

Now it occurred to me to use my belt. It was sturdy leather, it would serve. And I have excellent wrists.

I waited for those pursuing footsteps, in a final spasm of regret at what I had to do, to put an end to the letters. But there was no other way now—this night the man must die.

And afterwards, when they came for me?

When the rabbit can no longer kick, it can scream.

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Bemis, in the shadow of old Sills' tractor shed, waited for the two of them to appear: Sills' hot-blooded young wife, and the man who'd double-crossed him once and wouldn't live to do it again . . .

THIRD FROM THE END

by Roger Dee

THE LIGHTS OF OLD SILLS' PICKUP truck had not disappeared around the first bend of rutted hill road when his woman came out of the farmhouse and turned, hurrying in the warm summer darkness, toward the combination barn and garage behind. Cole Bemis let her pass within arm's reach of his hiding place in the deeper shadow of the tractor shed, and did not stir when she slid open the barn's long rail-and-trolley door and disappeared inside.

He waited with cold patience for another full minute, narrowing his attention against the shrill fiddling of crickets and the far-off metallic crying of a whippoorwill on the pine slope across the creek. Then a yellow wash of lantern light and Larry Jaffer's breathy voice calling, *"Baby!"* told him he had been right.

Six months of hayseeding for his lunatic uncle while he hid out had made Larry less particular about his women, but not less eager; by the time Bemis could cross the little distance to the sliding door, taking him would be as easy as potting a sitting duck.

Actually, it was easier.

During the afternoon Bemis had cased the place with field glasses from the pine slope, checking details with characteristic thoroughness, while Larry and old Sills worked together on a tractor. He knew what to expect now: a drafty, haylofted barn hall, tiered at one end with baled hay, its planked rear wall racked with farming gear and mechanic's tools. Near the front, a dusty tractor with its motor disassembled and scattered on a greasy canvas tarpaulin. At the other end, a leather-hinged door that led to a storage room, an ancient three-legged grindstone standing to one side and two topless fifty-gallon metal barrels on the other. The nearer corners had been out of range of his vision, and it must be in one of these that Larry slept.

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A hell of a place to find a red-hot like Larry, but its very unlikeliness had come within a whisper of making the cross-up in Gary successful.

Bemis went in with his gun up and caught the two of them cold, wrapped in each other's arms on Jaffers' rumpled cot in the corner. Jaffers still wore soiled shorts, but the woman's dress lay shapeless as a sack on the straw-covered dirt of the floor. She had been wearing nothing else. Jaffers, his hairy shoulders tense with anticipatory excitement, was running his hands over her quivering body and murmuring incoherencies.

Bemis could have waited them out without being noticed, but it suited his nature to spoil the moment.

"The kids back in Gary should see this," he said. "You look like a goddamned baboon in rut."

They sprang apart like a sudden explosion of flesh.

The woman screamed in a hoarse, smothered wailing of sound. Jaffers gaped unbelievingly, shoulders bowed and hands curled into limp half-fists that gave weight to Bemis' simile. Six months of farm work had sloughed off twenty pounds of Jaffers' surplus weight, and his hands were calloused and indelibly grimed with dirt and grease.

"*Cole*," Jaffers breathed.

"I found a woman in Gary who remembered you had an uncle down here," Bemis said. "It was a real scream, she said, the way you sketched him in."

He reached back and drew the sliding door shut. "You wanted a one-way split on that payroll haul, and you're getting it. Give."

The woman stooped to pick up her dress from the straw and Bemis stopped her with a warning flick of the gun. "Keep still, you."

She looked at him sullenly through the dark tangle of hair that had fallen across her face, and it surprised him to see at closer range that Jaffers' taste—or luck—was better than he had thought. She was young, less than half old Sills' age, not pretty but built on a lusty scale of firm-breasted and heavy-legged capability that made him think: *Some women are made for one thing. This is one of them.* With a system full of fire and an impotent idiot for a husband, she was made to order for Larry.

"I want my dress," she said. Her voice was as sullen as her face. "I don't want you looking at me like that."

Jaffers said nervously, "Be quiet, Cora. He'd as soon kill us both as not."

Bemis nodded agreement. "Thirty-two grand. Shell it out, Larry."

Jaffers put out calloused hands, pleadingly. "For God's sake,

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Cole! Not all of it—I've worked like a dog for that money! I—"

"You'll die like one," Bemis said with cold promise, "if you don't pony up. You think I've come this far to bluff?"

Farm life had either hardened Jaffers' nerve along with his muscle or left him as crazy as his uncle. He went stubborn.

"You'll never find it if you scratch me."

"I'll find it," Bemis said confidently. "I know you, pal. You wouldn't trust that thirty-two grand more than twenty feet from your bunk."

He took out his flashlight and moved around the garage, keeping his face toward the two by the cot. The tiered hay he dismissed at a glance because it might be sold or fed at any time. The loose stuff in the loft was out for the same reason; burying the money was too obvious even for Jaffers.

He looked at Jaffers speculatively when he came to the two drums by the storage-room door. They were half-full of used motor oil, the thriftily-saved drainings of tractor and truck transmissions serviced for his neighbors by old Sills.

Jaffers' expression gave him away.

"Ah," Bemis said.

He lifted a pitchfork from the rack of tools on the rear wall and stirred first one barrel and then the other. At the bottom of the second he felt the tines touch something solid and heavy—from the feel of it, a square package roughly the size of a shoebox.

"Not bad for a meathead," Bemis said. "Weight it and seal it in a plastic freezer bag, drop it in and forget it. You're almost smart, Larry."

The spirit went out of Jaffers like wine out of a broken bottle. "I might have known," he said. "Damn you, Cole, I never could outguess you!"

The woman stooped again to pick up her dress and Bemis, because he had found what he came for, let her retrieve it. She did not cover herself at once but watched him with sullen attention, her hands wadding the dress into a shapeless ball of soiled and faded cloth.

Ignoring her was a mistake. Without a muscle-twitch of warning she flung the wadded garment at Bemis' face and screamed, "Get him, honey!"

Bemis ducked instinctively, and in that hair-fine instant of reflex lost command. Jaffers' work-hardened body struck him headlong, slamming him back against the leather-hinged door. The door burst open under the impact and Bemis sprawled through on a hard plank flooring littered with shucks and broken corncobs. Jaffers plunged after him, cursing wildly.

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The gun jarred out of Bemis' hand and thumped on the floor. Jaffers' fist caught him viciously high up on the face, tearing the cheek and battering his head against the planking. Bemis clutched at him desperately and they rolled like fighting dogs until Cora ran in with a long-handled stillson wrench from the tool rack.

She caught Bemis underneath Jaffers and swung the wrench with both hands, grunting with effort. The heavy gripping-head overshot Bemis' skull by an inch and thudded against the flooring with a force that drove it out of her hands. The shank of the handle caught Bemis across the temple and sent him whirling giddily down into a black pit of unconsciousness.

Still he had enough command of himself, when Jaffers' weight lifted from his chest, to hold his breath.

"You goin' to make sure?" Cora's slow voice asked. She was breathing hard.

Jaffers laughed shortly, a relieved bark of sound. "I think you cracked his skull like a canteloupe, baby. He's not breathing."

They went out together.

Bemis fought to roll over and feel for his gun, he could not summon the strength. Darkness sifted down like a suffocating black snow, burying him slowly. From an endless distance he heard Jaffers' voice: ". . . through hiding out. Get the money and . . ."

He was almost beyond hearing at all when Cora screamed, a shrill and senseless wail of animal terror. An old man's voice answered, cracked and wild with fury.

Old Sills.

There were two stentorian shotgun blasts, and after that a querulous muttering that faded to nothing at all.

Cole woke with a throbbing agony in his head. The storage-room door stood ajar, as Jaffers had left it, and by the lantern light streaming in he checked his watch and saw that he had been out for the better part of an hour.

His first thought was of the gun. He pushed himself to his hands and knees and scrabbled through the litter of corncobs on the floor, and knew when he could not find it that Jaffers had taken it.

He pulled himself erect finally and pushed open the door.

"The crazy old bastard," he said, unbelievingly. "He's out burying them!"

There was blood everywhere on the straw, but no bodies.

But the three barrels stood by the doorway, and in one of them was a plastic bag that held his thirty-two grand. He tried to remember which, and began to sweat when he could not.

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Something else was wrong, too, something overlooked or out of place. That blow on the head—

He limped over to the drums and found two of them level to the brim with dirty oil. The other was less than a quarter full, and he remembered then that the package had been in a barrel little short of empty.

He caught up the pitchfork from the floor to stir the oil, and swore in cold panic when the tines touched nothing. Had the old man found it when he moved the bodies?

"It's in one of the others," he said aloud. "The fool *couldn't* have found it there."

He drove the fork into the next drum and grunted when it met an obstruction just below the viscous, mirror-black surface. He heaved on the handle, prying upward, and fell back retching uncontrollably when Cora Sills' face bobbed sluggishly up to stare back at him with dead, discolored eyes.

He was still gagging dryly a moment later when old Sills came in with a five-gallon spout can in one hand and a double-barrelled shotgun in the other.

The old man said, "Well, I'll *be*!" in a voice cracked with astonishment. "I thought you was dead too, son!"

He put down the can and stood with the shotgun half-raised staring at Bemis with round, irrational light eyes.

"I drained the tractor for more oil," he said. He grinned confidentially, showing barren pink gums. "Wouldn't of thought of it if you hadn't left the fork in the drum, but when I found the money I seen what a sharp hidin' place it was. Nobody'll find *them* in there, either. I'll burn the straw and clothes and say they run off together, and nobody'll doubt it."

And nobody would. Realizing that, it took Bemis slow seconds to find his voice.

"Look, there's thirty-two thousand dollars in that package. I'll give you Larry's split if—"

The old man giggled. "I counted it, son. Reckon I can spend it, too."

The jarring sense of something overlooked came back to Bemis, and this time he identified it. There had been only two in the beginning, but now—

He pulled his eyes sickly away from the third barrel and found old Sills squinting at him with pale fixity behind the shiny brass bead of his shotgun sight.

"With the oil in this can, now," the old man said, "you ought to just about fill it."

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Dan was bitter about a lot of things: the promotion he didn't get, his failure to make the grade on a big-city police force. But he wasn't going to let any trigger-happy young M.P. tell him how to do his job . . .

SMALL-TOWN COP

by Borden Deal

IT WAS NOT EASY TO TELL WHEN Dan Toland was angry. Anger didn't change his face or tighten his voice; he kept it bottled deep inside where it didn't show. Outwardly he was as impassive, slow, and deliberate as always.

Right now, this morning, he was plenty mad, and not only at the young man sitting beside him in the patrol car. He glanced at him, wondering when he was going to open his mouth again and say something else about small-town cops.

The young man was bigger than Dan Toland. He had the heft of a big-city cop and that kind of face, too—young and tough with flat blue eyes and a tight mouth. He was in plain-clothes so no one but Dan Toland would know that he was a sergeant in the Army Military Police. Dan had to help him pick up an A.W.O.L.

But Dan's anger went even deeper than the needling he'd been getting from the sergeant. He wheeled the car around a corner. He was thinking about the new Chief of their five-man police force. His name was Harry Withers, and Dan had been on the force for years before he had. But Harry had been in with the new people in City Hall . . . and he had been made the new Chief instead of Dan.

Dan should have turned in his gun. He knew that now, after three months of Harry Withers riding him, trying to get rid of him. Harry found it uncomfortable to have Dan Toland under him. But Dan was a stubborn man. . . .

"Any time you're ready to start thinking about picking up my boy," the young man said. . . . "I'd like to get out of this town today."

Dan turned his head and looked at him. "Listen, Sergeant," he said. "I told you I'd cooperate with you. But I've got my regular duties to cover, too. Johnny isn't going to run away."

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"He did once," the sergeant said tightly. He swore. "I hate these small-town deals. Next time I hope they send me to Chicago, where the local cops at least know their job."

Dan Toland thought about Chicago. He had wanted to be on a big-city police force himself, once, but he hadn't made it; he just wasn't hefty enough. Desire didn't mean a thing if you didn't make the physical grade. But if you did—well, there was all that training, being shown the right way to handle a tough and search him, to enter a building, to control a mob.

He had come South to Watkinsville after he'd failed to get on the force, mostly because his brother was already working for the city here. After a few years Dan had helped elect the right man into City Hall, and he'd gone on the police force after all. It was the real thing, with gun and badge and authority, except it was small-town instead of big-city, Watkinsville instead of Chicago.

He eased the car to the curb at the next intersection and stopped. He looked at the big high school across the way, the grounds thronging with students. They were crossing the street on foot ahead of him. He liked to be here in the early morning; his presence alone slowed the cars passing, inhibited jay-walking. Besides, it made him feel good to watch the kids. The sergeant shifted in his seat impatiently. Well, the sergeant could wait.

Dan had made a lot of mistakes at first, without the cop-training he'd hungered for. But he'd never made a political mistake and so he had hung on until he was the oldest man on the force. Politics hadn't made so much difference during those years. Until this last time, when he'd hoped for Chief. Sure, he'd helped the same man that Harry Withers had helped, for he was a good man and deserved to be Mayor. But somehow it hadn't made the difference Dan had been hoping for—Harry had been chosen for the job instead.

He started the car again, turning his head to look at the sergeant. "All right," he said. "We'll go see about Johnny Greer now."

"It's about time," the sergeant grunted. "If I ran my job the way you do I'd still be a private."

Yeah, Dan said to himself. Aloud he said, "He's been here five months already. He's not going to take out today. You could have just wired us a pick-up and we'd have sent him down to you."

The sergeant laughed. "You must not know your neighbors very well," he said. "Have you seen that boy's record lately? He's a tough customer . . . a very tough customer."

Dan brought Johnny Greer's face up to his mind. Yes, he'd been

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mean, all right. But not all that tough. And smart, too.

"He's been here all the time," he said. "Told it around that he'd been given a medical discharge."

The sergeant snorted. "Busted out of stockade—if you call that a medical."

"And here he was all the time," Dan said. "I've seen him downtown a lot lately. Doesn't seem to be working, just hanging around."

He was a nice-looking boy, too. In his twenties now. Had one of those big, domineering women for a mother, and a father that didn't amount to much. Dan reviewed their faces, too, the father's thin and uncertain, a man born to be a failure. He was a salesman; brushes, insurance, Watkins products, magazine subscriptions . . . things like that. The mother held the family together. She was a large woman with a habit of getting her own way. That probably hadn't been too hard with her husband, but it was a different story with Johnny. He had apparently inherited something of his mother's strong will.

He shifted in the car seat, relaxing. This would be easy. Johnny Greer wouldn't be expecting to be picked up at this late date, and the sergeant was in plain-clothes. If it wasn't for Dan's mad at the Chief and City Hall, this would just be a routine morning.

He slowed for an intersection, then he heard the screeching yowl of tires. He jerked to a lurching halt and stared as a car rocketed across the intersection from a dead stop. There were two boys in the front seat, both laughing, their teeth flashing in the speed of the car. They were scratching.

Dan recognized the driver. He didn't try to give chase—there were still too many schoolkids on the street. He heard the car howl around another corner, going toward the high school. He frowned; he didn't like that. Bob Tolliver had finished high school last year. He shouldn't be hanging around there still.

"Sorry," he said to the sergeant. "Johnny will have to wait. We're going downtown first."

The sergeant just grunted. That was enough; it said everything. Too bad you don't like it, Dan said silently. But there are jobs and jobs, and Johnny Greer is just one of them.

"Were you on the Chicago force before you went into the army?"

The sergeant looked at him. "Not exactly," he said. "I was ready to go up for the examinations when they called me. Before Korea. I've been in the Army since, because I like the Military Police. But I'm getting out after this tour and then I'll get on the Chicago force."

He was very confident. Dan Toland looked sideways at his big, young bulk. He'd probably

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make it, too. Dan sighed. That would have been good. By now, Dan could have been almost anything if he'd gotten on a good, big force with rules and regulations and protection of tenure. But he hadn't been big enough, heavy enough, strong enough. He was a small-town cop and that was all that had ever been in him.

He drove into the downtown square and parked his car before the theater. "You can wait," he said. "Or come with me. Whichever you want."

The sergeant opened his door. "This is going to take all day," he said. "I might as well come with you." He grinned. "Watch how you small-town guys do your work."

"There's nothing to it," Dan said mildly. "Just a little job."

Dan glanced at his watch. Joe Tolliver wouldn't be in his hardware store right now. He'd be in the drugstore having a Coke. They went in and Dan saw Joe sitting at the counter alone, the soft drink in front of him. He eased down on the seat beside him.

"Hello, Joe," he said. "What'll you have?" he asked the sergeant.

"A Coke," the sergeant said.

"Hi, Dan," Joe said, turning on his stool. "Have one on me."

"Not this time," Dan said. "I'm buying."

"Let's match for it anyway."

They matched and Dan lost. He always did, with Joe. He took a swallow of the Coke without the straw, feeling the ice slivers against his teeth. "I thought Bob was going off to college this summer," he said.

Joe Tolliver frowned. "He wanted to," he said. "But the hardware business . . . we just couldn't make it. Maybe by next fall . . ."

"I saw him a while ago," Dan said. He kept his voice mild and even. "He was scratching that car of yours across a red light. He's going to ruin that car."

Joe didn't answer him. Both of them were thinking about the same thing; the two times Dan had already picked up Bob Tolliver.

Dan sighed. "If he found himself a good job, he'd have money to start school in the fall," he said reflectively. "He'd be off the streets and have something to do, too."

Joe spread his hands. "You know how this town is. Somebody has to die to make a job for somebody else. He could work in my hardware store but that . . ."

Dan stood up and motioned to the sergeant. "I've got to go," he said, paying for the three Cokes. "I'll see if there's a place for him down at the mill. I'll talk to Whisenant about it."

Joe stood up, too. "Thanks, Dan," he said. "Thanks a lot."

Dan laughed. "You won, Joe.

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No need to thank me. I'll let you know what Whisenant says." He paused, thoughtfully. "I'd hate to pick that boy of yours up again, Joe. I know it's just high spirits. But high spirits and an automobile can kill folks. And he's too old to be hanging around the high school."

"Sure thing," Joe said. "See you, Dan."

Dan and the sergeant walked back to the car and got in.

"I was wondering why you didn't arrest him," the sergeant said. "Scratching like that . . ."

"Bob's a good boy," Dan said. "Just restless . . . bored . . . he needs to get out of this town. Go to school."

"Do we go now?" the sergeant said, looking at his watch. He had at least learned patience this morning.

Dan jerked out of his thoughtfulness. "Sure," he said. "I want to see Whisenant at the mill, anyway, and Johnny Greer lives out that way. We'll kill two birds with one stone."

They drove around the square and took a tree-lined street out. Soon the trees stopped, leaving the flimsy little houses baking hot in the sun. There were no sidewalks here and children tumbled in the dust on the shady side of the houses. This was where the mill-workers, the hired hands, the store clerks, and small-time salesmen like Johnny's father lived.

They were driving slowly over the bumpy pavement when Dan saw Johnny Greer walking along the padded-earth sidewalk.

"There he is," he said, pointing. "We can pick him up without going to his house." He was relieved. He wouldn't have to deal with Johnny's mother.

He eased the car up alongside Johnny Greer. There was a vacant lot here, the dusty weeds hanging out over the side-path.

"Hello, Johnny," he said.

Johnny stopped, startled, and whirled to look at him. His young, good-looking face was white. Dan saw the running look in his eyes and he started getting out of the car, seeming to move casually, unhurriedly. The sergeant was already out on his side when Dan came around the front.

There was still uncertainty in Johnny's face. "What . . . ?" he said, his throat gulping the single word.

"They want you back down at camp," Dan said. "You . . ."

He was reaching for his arm when Johnny whirled away from them, running straight across the vacant lot. Dan knew he didn't have a chance of out-running him but he started anyway. The sergeant was running too, cursing as he pulled a gun from a shoulder holster. Dan's breath caught, hard, and he poured on the speed. The sergeant stopped suddenly, bracing himself to fire,

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and Dan plowed into him. They both went down together and by the time they had untangled, Johnny Greer was out of sight.

"Clumsy, small-town cops!" the sergeant snarled. He dusted at his civilian suit with one hand. "I'd have nailed him . . ."

"I don't know how they do it in Chicago," Dan said mildly. His anger had simmered down for a while but now it was boiling again. "Maybe you think different up there. Here we don't shoot until there's no other way out."

"Sure," the sergeant said. "You might lose a vote that way." He stopped, glaring at Dan. "What do we do now?"

Dan turned and walked away from him without speaking. He went back to the car and got in under the wheel. He gunned the motor without looking and raked it away from the curb, leaving the sergeant clawing at the door-handle on his side. He didn't care. He'd had enough of the sergeant for one day. Him and his Chicago police. He'd probably make it, too, with his M.P. experience and all. He might not even need all that rookie training. But right now, to him, the sergeant was just a liability.

He stopped in front of the house where Johnny lived. He sat quietly, looking at it for a moment. It was still and silent but he had the feeling he was being watched from inside.

He got out of the car and by the time he reached the steps Johnny Greer's father was standing in the doorway.

"Hello, Mr. Greer," he said, as though nothing had happened. "Is Johnny here?"

He saw the flicker of lying in the man's eyes. He had a thin face with a weak chin and the eyes looked tired of trying. Dan wondered what it was like to have a father like that.

"N—no," Mr. Greer said. "I haven't seen him . . ."

The screen door banged open behind Mr. Greer and the mother came out on the porch. "What do you want with my boy?" she said. Her voice was robust, belligerent. "What are you trying to do?"

"Mrs. Greer," Dan said mildly. "The military police have a pick-up out on him. He's A.W.O.L. — busted out of the stockade. I've got to turn him over."

"Coming around and bothering honest folks!" Mrs. Greer blustered. "He's got a medical discharge . . . and he needed it, after the way they treated him down there. He's going to apply for a disability . . ."

He cut in on the flow of words. "I don't guess you'd let me search the house," he said.

She glared at him. "Got a search warrant? Show me your search . . ."

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He sighed. "I can get it," he said, turning away. He beckoned to Mr. Greer. "Come on. I want to talk to you."

"Anything you got to say—" Mrs. Greer began.

Dan put his hand firmly on Mr. Greer's arm. "Come on."

Mr. Greer glanced at his wife apologetically, then came with Dan down to the car. Dan leaned on the window and looked at him.

"What happened to Johnny down there in the army?" he said. "He never was in any trouble to amount to anything around here, as I remember. A little fist-fighting, things like that. Nothing as serious as A.W.O.L. and escape from a stockade."

Mr. Greer shook his head. "I don't know," he said worriedly. "He just went wild. He couldn't take the discipline . . . kept on fighting back and fighting back every time they leaned on him." He stopped, drawing a heavy breath. "I could never do anything with him, Dan. His mother, now . . ."

Dan looked at the tired face. "And she's protecting him," he said grimly. "Now, look here, Mr. Greer. I'm going on back downtown. I want you to bring Johnny into the office down there."

Mr. Greer looked uncertain. "What will they . . ."

Dan shook his head. "I can't promise a thing. He'll have to do stockade time. He may get a dishonorable when he gets out. But he's earned his punishment and he's got to take it."

"I can't send him back to—"

"Yes, you can," Dan cut in. "Because if you don't we're going to be out here to get him. With guns, if necessary. That's the way it is, Mr. Greer. It would be better if you brought him down."

Mr. Greer put one trembling hand up to his mouth. "I can't make him come," he said. "I've never been able to control him. And his mother—"

"That's up to you," Dan said, getting into the car. "I'll give you two hours to do it in."

He drove away, leaving Mr. Greer standing there looking uncertainly after him. He didn't see the sergeant on the way back, though he looked for him, a little ashamed of his hasty anger. Then he quit thinking about Johnny Greer and the sergeant and began thinking about Mr. Whisenant.

By the time he pulled into the mill's parking lot he had turned up in his mind what he had wanted to remember about Mr. Whisenant. So the little talk didn't take long, and when he emerged he had a job for Bob Tolliver in the Shipping Department. Joe Tolliver would be very pleased about that; and Dan figured he wouldn't have any more trouble with Bob.

He drove up to the City Hall and parked. It was a low, dirty

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building on a back street and he went inside, with the slow-moving fans. He went to his desk, looking around for the sergeant without seeing him. He saw the note there. He kept straight on for the Mayor's office upstairs without sitting down.

He had halfway expected it. The Mayor was there, with Harry Withers the police chief. And the sergeant. A very angry sergeant.

"What's all this?" the Mayor demanded. "Refusing to cooperate with the military authorities."

Dan looked at him. He was angry, but it didn't show. The Mayor was a fine man. But no man is better than his information, and he knew that Harry Withers had been talking to the Mayor about him.

"Refusing to cooperate?" His face was mild and unwary. He glanced at the sergeant. "How did I . . . ?"

The sergeant reddened. "He tackled me from behind when I was stopping our subject," he said angrily. "And then he ran off in the car and left me standing there like a fool." He glared at Dan. "I started to shoot your tires out. So help me God I—"

"I'm glad you didn't do that, Sergeant," Dan said softly. "I don't have those tires paid for yet." He looked back at the Mayor. "I stumbled into the sergeant," he said half-truthfully. "And when I left him . . . well, him being a big-city officer and all that, I thought he'd be in the car by the time I made it. I was in a hurry."

"Where were you going?" Harry Withers said nastily. "I warned you last week, Toland. I told you the next time I—"

"Sure," Dan said. "The next time I stepped out of line you'd fire me. And then you'd have the highest seniority on the force." He saw the Mayor's eyes flick toward Harry Withers with sudden understanding.

"Wait a minute," the Mayor said, holding up his hand. "Where were you going in such a hurry?"

"I wanted to catch Johnny Greer before he grabbed a freight."

"Did you find him?"

Dan shook his head. "I didn't see him, no. But he was at home. His Dad is bringing him in."

"Why didn't you do it yourself?" Harry said bluntly. "If you had the chance . . ."

Dan turned toward him. "I figured it would be better if his father did it," he said mildly. He glanced at the sergeant. "If he comes in voluntarily it ought to make a difference to the military. Shouldn't it, Sergeant?"

The sergeant shifted his big feet. "Well, maybe," he conceded. "If he gives himself up . . ."

Harry Withers snorted. "He's

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ten miles out of town now and getting farther away every minute."

The Mayor looked steadily at Dan. "Are you sure his father will bring him in?"

Dan took a deep breath. "Yes. I'm sure."

"If you're wrong . . ." the Mayor warned.

Dan turned and left the room. His anger was getting ready to explode now, and he didn't trust himself. He went downstairs and sat at his desk. It was hot in the room and he took off his cap, mopping his forehead. He looked around.

Well, it hadn't been much of a policeman's job, anyway. He'd known that for a long time. But it had been the best he could do; and maybe he hadn't been much of a policeman, either. All that training he'd never had a chance to get. . . . But he'd liked it—he'd liked it all the way.

He opened a drawer, getting ready to clean out the desk. He didn't have a lot of confidence in Mr. Greer. A weak man all his life, with an overbearing wife as mother to his son. No, he . . .

He looked up, startled, as the door banged open. He saw Mr. Greer stalk into the room, Johnny beside him. He marched stiffly straight to Dan Toland's desk.

"Here he is," he said grimly. "He's ready to give himself up."

Dan stared at Mr. Greer's swiftly puffing black eye. There were scratches on his face, and he was nursing a knuckle on his right hand. Johnny had a black eye, too, as well as a smashed lip.

Dan suppressed a grin. "You ready, Johnny?" he said.

Johnny wanted to glare at him, but he couldn't manage it. "Yes, sir," he said.

Dan stood up and put a hand on his shoulder. "You go on back down there, Johnny," he said. "Get yourself straightened out. And you come home clean the next time, hear? If you don't, your Dad will beat the socks off you." He grinned at Mr. Greer.

"Yes, sir," Johnny said humbly. "I'm sorry I caused so much trouble, Mr. Toland."

Dan laughed. "That's my business, Johnny. Let's go upstairs now. The sergeant's waiting for you."

Mr. Greer looked at Johnny. "Good luck, son," he said quietly. He put out a hand and, after a moment's hesitation, Johnny shook it. They shook hard, grinning at each other, and Dan looked away.

"Goodbye, Dad," Johnny said. "Take care of Mother."

"I'll do that," Mr. Greer said.

Dan led Johnny up the stairs into the Mayor's office. "Here he is," he said. "Take it easy on him, Sarge. He's a good boy."

The sergeant didn't look so big-city and sure of himself. "I will,

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Dan," he said. He stopped. "I . . . Dan—"

Dan waved his hand and started out of the room. He wasn't mad at anybody any more. He felt good.

"Wait a minute, Dan," the Mayor said. "I want to talk to you."

Dan stopped, and the Mayor looked at the sergeant and the Chief of Police. They got up and left, taking Johnny with them. The Mayor gazed at Dan.

"You were taking a big chance," he said gravely.

Dan nodded his head without answering.

"You've never had any actual police training, have you?" the Mayor continued.

Dan shook his head. He wanted to leave now. But he couldn't.

"Harry Withers did have," the Mayor said quietly. "That's why I passed you over, Dan. For that reason only."

Then he stopped, looking thoughtfully at Dan. "But I wonder now. Maybe your kind of experience, knowing these people you deal with, maybe that's worth more."

Dan straightened himself. "It's too late now, anyway," he said carefully. "Harry is the Chief. It'll have to stay that way."

He waited for the Mayor to agree, but he didn't. He kept looking down thoughtfully at his desk. Then he lifted his eyes gratefully to Dan.

Dan smiled and went downstairs again. Harry was sitting rigidly at his desk, watching for his entrance. Dan could see the whiteness in his face. On an impulse, he went over and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Harry," he said. "You're still Chief. I don't even want it any more."

It was true, too. Being Chief was not his job. Not at all. He went on out of the office to his car. He had the rest of the routine to cover; and there was some good news, he remembered, for Joe Tolliver. He could catch a Coke at the same time. And maybe this time, just for once, he would win the toss.

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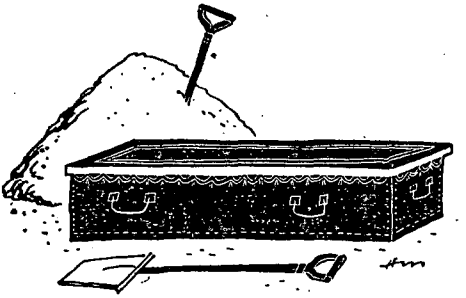

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